"Because social issues should be addressed"

Cathrine Ackerman
"Because Social Issues Should Be Addressed"

by

Catherine Ackerman

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA Photography Program
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, New York
June, 1991

Ken White, Chairperson
Chairman of Photographic Fine Arts Department
Rochester Institute of Technology

Grant Romer
Conservator
International Museum of Photography
at George Eastman House

Jim McGargee
Professor
Rochester Institute of Technology
PERMISSION STATEMENT

Title of Thesis: "Because Social Issues Should Be Addressed"

I Catherine Ackerman

hereby do not grant permission to the Wallace Memorial Library, of Rochester Institute of Technology, to reproduce my thesis in whole or in part.

Date: June 3, 1991
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Experience</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Process</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis Layout</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slides, individual images</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slides, installation</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Because Social Issues Should Be Addressed"1

INTRODUCTION

Ever since I became aware of documentary photography I have had an internalized energy that responds to it, as a result I enjoy photographing in this manner more than any other style of photography. Mostly, I photograph people in their own environment, capturing on film the unique qualities and mannerisms that contribute to make up a person's individuality. To photograph body and facial expressions of joy, anger, fear, and pain, is to have a record of the psychological nouns that we as humans know and feel all the time in the course of living. To go beyond the purely visual record, and instill a viewer with the feelings of the psychological reality of my subjects by showing their physical boundaries and the effects of these boundaries on them is what comprises a good documentary photograph. The beauty of documentary photography is its power to educate people about the myriad physical and psychological complications of human existence.

I have tried to create such documentary essays in the past. For example, in one essay I demonstrated how the "Church", or more specifically "religion", effected people's lives. In essence, all the people who came in contact with the institution: the congregation, priests, and nuns were my subjects. In another essay, children were photographed both as individuals, and while they were in groups, and these were displayed together to instill in the viewer a sensibility of "childhood". These essays were very challenging to create because a repertoire of skills were needed to communicate with all types of people, young and old alike. Yet, at the same time, these adventures were very enjoyable because I love to interact with people, and investigate their various lifestyles and philosophies. Confidence in the outcome of these two essays induced me to continue photographing in this vein. The need for more challenge and growth led me to take the next logical step in this genre: to create a documentary essay with one person or family as my subject, and to do this with color
photographs. For my graduate thesis work my endeavors were concentrated in this direction.

The idea that people of the lower economic class are of a cyclical lifestyle, is the main thrust of my thesis, and the situation of Victor Rivera, Evelyn Diaz, and Crystal Diaz exemplify this. I realize the cyclical phenomenon is not particular to this class, but unlike any other economic class, it is more abrasive to the psychological, and sometimes physical qualities of individuals. For the purpose of clarity this paper will have the following structure: first, I will tell of my experiences with Evelyn, Victor, and Crystal, next, explain my thoughts and reactions to this project, then, discuss the response of this project from my peers and board members, and finally, discuss the display and layout of the photographic essay.

THESIS EXPERIENCE

During the initial stage of deciding a thesis topic I debated whether to photograph my family, or create another series of self portraits (I had completed one several years earlier), but I really wanted to focus my energies on another documentary essay, and not a series of images. One night this thought provoked me to take an auto-everything camera loaded with color film out onto the streets of my neighborhood, Rochester's 19th ward. The streets on this side of the city aren't very safe because it is an economically depressed area, and crime is prevalent. I was slightly intimidated by the various characters that were hanging out on the streets, who were both young and old, and predominantly black. I asked the more friendly looking if I could photograph them. (Photography was a great way to start a conversation.) Most of these pre-thesis shots were boring because they didn't go below the surface of being "street photographs", but at this time I didn't expect them to; it was only an exploratory exercise. The only accomplishment during this night was to meet a man named Patrick.

Patrick was a tall, handsome, black man, and he was the last person I photographed before the sun set. In our conversation he asked me how was I able to talk to a stranger on these streets. This question the logical part of my mind
couldn't answer, nor had even thought about. I learned that Patrick had just moved to Rochester a few weeks earlier, and sensed he was just as eager for my friendship as I was for his. He lived on the corner of Chili and Thurston Avenues, in a brick apartment building that encompassed the whole corner lot. The front of this building contained a liquor store, a small neighborhood grocery market called Raymond's, a hair salon for black clientele, and a driving school. The apartment building was, for the most part, filled with welfare recipients. Initially, I wanted to photograph all the tenants in the apartment building because there was a unique bonding amongst these people, like an extended family. But these thoughts disappeared after Patrick introduced me to a couple of his friends.

A few days after meeting Patrick I returned with photographs for him. To get to his apartment I had to enter a side door by the parking lot (this lot doubled as a front yard for the apartment residents). The door opened into a dimly lit hallway, and stairs, going up and down, led to apartments. He lived upstairs in a small one bedroom. (I found out later all of the apartments were small.) While sitting at Patrick's kitchen table, which was cramped into a corner in front of the doorway of the kitchenette, we drank coffee and talked. I photographed while we talked. Our conversation was mostly small talk; the type that one would have while spending time getting to know a new friend.

This was the first of many visits to Patrick's. During these visits he introduced me to many people that lived in the building, and some I photographed at a later time. One evening Patrick introduced me to Victor Rivera, a short, muscular man of Puerto Rican descent. While talking with Victor I learned he was living with his girlfriend, Evelyn, and their baby girl, Crystal. In this conversation Victor asked me if I would take a picture of Crystal that evening, and I jumped at the chance. (This incident resulted in the portrait of Crystal sitting in the hallway, which I included in my thesis show (slide #41). After taking the picture arrangements were made to photograph Victor with his family the following weekend.

This photo shoot was the beginning of my adventures with Victor, Evelyn, and Crystal, and consequently the beginning of my thesis. During these adventures I
learned an immense amount about the history and personalities of my subjects, and became very good friends with Evelyn.

Evelyn grew up in Queens, New York under the care of her foster mother Mrs. Lucenta, a woman of Italian descent. Her biological mother brought her from Puerto Rico, and put her in a foster home. After living in a few foster homes Evelyn moved in with the Lucentas in their Long Island home. The Lucentas were unable to have children, which prompted them to become foster parents. Evelyn was the only child that stayed on permanently with the Lucentas, yet she was never legally adopted. When Mr. Lucenta died Mrs. Lucenta sold their home and bought one in Queens. Evelyn moved with her. Evelyn only has a few memories of Mr. Lucenta (the only father she knew) because he died when she was very young. Mrs. Lucenta is Evelyn's mother in every respect except biological.

I met Mrs. Lucenta when she was 72 years old. If Evelyn was 20 at that time this means Mrs. Lucenta was 59 when Evelyn first moved in with her; this is a large generation gap between mother and daughter. Mrs. Lucenta is the only role model, and the person whose values Evelyn was disciplined by while growing up. Of course there are people Evelyn interacted with outside of the home that influenced her as well, but it is Mrs. Lucenta's values that Evelyn absorbed.

At age 12, Evelyn was sent away to a detention home twice for skipping school. (This was the State's decision, and Mrs. Lucenta had no control over it.) Evelyn met quite a few people while living in these homes, who were there for reasons similar to Evelyn's. Some of the girls became her best friends. While living in one of the homes, Evelyn met Victor at school. Victor would wait outside Evelyn's classroom for her until class was over. He would go to school just to hang out, but never attended classes.

Victor was born in Puerto Rico, and speaks fluent Spanish and English. He is the eldest of six children. When Victor was young his father deserted the family, and his mother, Maria, was left to raise the children alone. Later, Maria immigrated to New York City with Victor and his two sisters, Norma and Madeline. Maria lacked money and an education, and she could not obtain a job which allowed her
to acquire the basic necessities, food and shelter. This prompted her to turn to welfare for support. A few years later, Maria had three more children, Serrata and Errata (twins), fathered by one man, and Jackie, fathered by another. Maria followed Jackie's father, Cito, to Rochester, where he eventually abandoned them. Maria didn't move back to New York City. Welfare became a way of life for Maria, and this attitude (I believe) was passed on to her children. The family was still on welfare when I met them.

Shortly before Maria moved to Rochester she kicked Victor out of her house. He stayed with Evelyn, at Mrs. Lucenta's, under the premise that they were going to get married. According to Victor and Evelyn they weren't allowed to sleep together. Evelyn was to sleep in her twin bed, and Victor on the floor by the side. To make sure of this Mrs. Lucenta slept on the floor at the top of the stairs outside Evelyn's bedroom, where the door was always kept open. There was a matter of two or three feet between Mrs. Lucenta's head and Victor's feet. The precautions Mrs. Lucenta took didn't work because Evelyn became pregnant at age eighteen.

My thesis that these patterns are repeated cyclically is promoted with the conception of Crystal because the cycle continues. I believe this because both Victor's and Evelyn's family and individual background history provide the right situations conducive to continue the cycle of poverty. The facts about Victor are: Victor at age 17 hardly had a ninth grade education. He has never held a job for more than three continuous months. (His real job experience was on the streets stealing cars.) His mother smoked marijuana, and talked of other drugs in front of the children. He was raised on welfare without a father or a male figure head present in the home.

Evelyn comes from a somewhat more advantageous background than Victor in that her mother tried to instill in Evelyn her own middle class values. Mrs. Lucenta emphasized the importance of an education (Evelyn only needs a few credits to receive her high school diploma), the value of hard work, and has always been there when Evelyn needed her. I believe it was Evelyn's adolescent years and her contact with friends from the homes, as well as her relationship with Victor that
sucked her back into the "cycle".

Victor left Evelyn when he found out she was pregnant. His mother had already left for Rochester so he stayed with friends, did drugs, stole cars, and whatever else he could to get money. Four months into Evelyn's pregnancy Victor returned to Mrs. Lucenta's home, again under the premise that he would marry Evelyn, only to leave again. Before he left this second time there was a big argument which ended with Victor beating Evelyn, and hitting Mrs. Lucenta. (Mrs. Lucenta told me that after this event occurred she despised him.) Evelyn didn't see Victor again until Crystal was born.

When Crystal was born by cesarian section on April 5, 1985 Evelyn gave her her own last name, Diaz. In order to survive, Evelyn and Crystal went on welfare while living at Mrs. Lucenta's. Evelyn and Crystal didn't receive any money from Victor because Mrs. Lucenta knew how he got his money, and didn't want it in her house.

About a month after Crystal was born Victor returned to Mrs. Lucenta's. Here is Evelyn's account of that event:

"When he came back to me I didn't recognize him. It was after she was born [when] he came to see her in the hospital, and that was the last I seen of him. When he did come over, my mother had went to the doctor's that morning. I said, [to myself] "damn," I opened the door, "Now I hope this guy don't see the outside door is open." And I was looking at him, he said, "Evelyn it's me." I was looking at him like "Who are you?" because this guy I'm looking at has got a bead band on. In a way his face is all dirty, by his arms you could see he's been fighting, and his face was puffed out too. I was looking at him, "Who are you? Oh my god I'm going to get raped or mugged over here, and I got the baby in the house." And he said, "It's me, Victor." And by his voice when he said, "it's me," I looked at
him. I was shocked! He came in. He came in and picked Crystal up. [I said] "tell me what's going on." He said "No, I'll be back later." He never came back. A couple of days later I got a call from the detective of the police station. He said, "Do you know Victor Rivera?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Can you come up to the 103rd precinct?" (Evelyn and Crystal went to the precinct at the time Victor appeared in front of the judge for theft.) "But the judge went soft on him. It was a lady judge. She seen the baby; she couldn't resist her because he walked in the court with the carriage and everything. She said, "Are you Victor Rivera?" He said, "Yeah." She said, "Your case is up. She said, "I'll let you go on one condition, that you raise your daughter to be a decent person, to work for her living." And he was out, but the judge in Rochester wasn't so nice, nope, four months that's the limit."2

After Victor's court appearance in New York City, he, Evelyn, and Crystal moved to Rochester and lived in the same apartment building as his mother (Patrick's). They went on welfare. Soon after their arrival, Victor and another man broke into Raymond's Grocery Store and stole money. When the cops searched Evelyn's and Victor's apartment they didn't find anything, but a couple of days later Maria found money in the couch, and turned him in. He claimed his innocence in court, but was sent away to jail for four months.

I met Evelyn and Victor after the theft of Raymond's store. I eventually became very good friends with both of them, but found myself talking on a more personal level with Evelyn than with Victor. Sometimes I visited them for conversation. I always brought my camera along, but didn't necessarily use it. I observed them, their lifestyle, and their interaction with Crystal. Clearly, Crystal was the responsibility of Evelyn when Victor and her were together.
Crystal was Evelyn's full time job. Victor accepted very little responsibility in the care of Crystal. What little Victor did do, he didn't do for long because he went to jail in July, 1986, and wasn't released until the end of October. While he was incarcerated Evelyn and Crystal moved from the apartment building on Chili Avenue to an apartment in a multi-family house on Council Street which is located on the north side of Rochester. Maria also moved to an apartment on this street. At this time Evelyn didn't work, and both her and Crystal were on welfare, and the WIC Program (Women, Infants, and Children).

Several months passed before I saw Evelyn again, because at the time of her move I was in Syracuse, New York doing an internship at the newspaper, The Syracuse New Times. During this time we only had one telephone conversation as she didn't have a telephone. I felt a bit uneasy when we did get together after this interim as I had had two months full of busy activities while she did nothing the whole summer. She was stuck in the city. Compared to me, this seemed to suggest her inability to have control over her life.

Because of this I felt a bit guilty photographing her and her situation. I questioned whether or not I was exploiting her. Although this wasn't my intention. I asked myself what was inciting me to photograph this situation? I had no answer. I discussed this with Evelyn before I left for the summer, but because I was struggling for answers myself the conversation was very vague.

When I arrived at Evelyn's, after the two month interim, I wanted to bring my friendship into the apartment, not just my camera. I felt my camera would mask my friendship. She might think my only interest was to take photographs. These people became more than subjects to photograph, they were my friends. These thoughts provoked my decision to leave my camera in the car. After a while Evelyn inquired about my camera, and I responded with my feelings and doubts. Her reply prompted me to retrieve my camera and begin to photograph her again. Reentering Evelyn's life after a two month absence was like visiting an old friend, in spite of my initial uneasiness.
My friendship grew with Evelyn while Victor was in jail. We went grocery shopping, did errands, ate meals together, and enjoyed each other's company. During one errand to the hair care supply store (Evelyn had just had her hair permed) Evelyn told me she was leaving Victor. Her and this other man, James, whom she met during the summer, were moving in with her mother, Mrs. Lucenta, in New York City.

This news was difficult for me to receive. I knew this was the best thing for Evelyn and Crystal because the lifestyle that they were living was very depressed and stagnant. Things had to be better in New York City with her mother. At the very least they couldn't be any worse off. I hadn't met Mrs. Lucenta at that point, but I thought she could give Evelyn mental and financial support (in the form of a house to live in), while at the same time be a good role model for Crystal. Yet, I silently questioned the scruples of this man James. I didn't think his intentions were good. I felt that James was the only negative aspect of Evelyn's plan. (How do you tell a friend that you think their boyfriend is a worm?) She stated she loved him, and he told her the same. I did not want to influence her with my philosophies and feelings. (In general, I kept this as a rule while photographing.) Yet, on the other hand, my thesis was moving eight hours away; what was I going to do? How was Evelyn's move going to effect my thesis?

After Evelyn told me this news I spent as much time, short of sleeping over, as possible at her apartment. I practically shot film from the time I stepped out of my car till the moment I stepped back into it. As soon as I returned home I developed the film in my kitchen sink, and then hung it up to dry in my bedroom. The next morning I cut it and put it into sleeves. In the morning, if I didn't go to Evelyn's, I'd make contact prints, and workprints at school.

Evelyn wanted to be gone from Rochester before Victor's release from prison. The major reason she wanted to leave was she knew Victor would never change his ways: stealing, not working, and not caring about the family unit. She said he had talked about not stealing when they got back together the first time, but he did it again. He talked about change, but it never happened. Evelyn said she
wanted someone she could depend on in her life. She also feared for her life, because while Victor was in jail someone told him about her affair with James. (Evelyn believed Maria or one of his sisters told him.) She tried to keep their relationship a secret from everyone, but Victor's sisters were always at Evelyn's house; it was inevitable that they would suspect something, and even conclude the truth.

Everything about her departure and about James had to be kept a secret from Maria. Evelyn was afraid that Maria might do something to try to stop her leaving.

Evelyn visited Victor in jail one last time before she left for New York City. This visit was planned before her decision to leave Rochester was made. Evelyn and James decided to leave that night right after the visit. Maria, Madeline, Evelyn, Crystal, and I went to the jail together. In a bizarre way, this occasion seemed like a family affair to me.

Everyone except me had visited a jail before, I had never been to a jail. Before we could enter the jail we had to go through search procedures. After these procedures we were allowed to enter a concrete chamber with bullet proof windows. This was a waiting room for the visitors, beyond it were the prisoners and visiting stations. The bottom wall of the chamber was concrete brick, or a tile, that had, as a decorative feature, quarter inch holes in it, each one inch apart. Crystal ran her hands over these holes, and this motion made a strange high pitched popping noise, similar to tiny suction cups being pulled up fast off a surface. I was amused at this noise, and to the fact that Crystal had discovered this imprisoned musical instrument, until Evelyn said, "Oh, she remembers the noise they make." She went on to explain that this noise was discovered during their first visit. I couldn't believe at the age of two Crystal remembered events of three months past. I wondered how many of these memories of her prison visit would stay with her forever.

Evelyn, Maria, and Crystal went in to visit Victor first, and I sat in the chamber for a half hour with Madeline. We didn't talk much. Mostly I thought
about the people around me, the prisoners, the visitors, and the guards. I wondered what crimes these men had committed that put them behind bars. Was their "crime" that they were born into the wrong social economic structure?

The interaction between the visitors and the prisoners intrigued me. The visitors seemed to be mostly girlfriends. I saw one couple kissing good bye. Or, I thought it was goodbye. They were locked at the mouth. His hands rubbing her all over her body for some short-lived intimacy. The sensuality of touching was removed. It became an act for everyone else to observe, yet this sight seemingly went unnoticed by everyone. My rationalization at the time was that this behavior was a display of power, not love. Now, I see it as a display of love, propagated in this form because it is a learned behavior.

I entered the visiting room when Maria's half hour was up. Madeline changed her mind, and didn't want to go in at all. I sat there while Evelyn and Victor were talking. Crystal was on the other side of the table sitting on Victor's lap. (I hoped not a metaphor for the future.)

I asked a few questions of Victor. Questions that showed my ignorance. "What was it like being in jail?" He replied, "Hasn't Evelyn told you about it?" Our conversation transcended nothing more than small talk. Shortly thereafter his attention was given to Evelyn because she had started to cry, and he inquired why.

I felt uneasy listening to them talk, and got up and went to the bathroom. It was just a small jaunt across the room, therefore I walked slowly to allow me to have time to notice my surroundings, but also to give Victor and Evelyn some time to be alone together. Every visitor station was full. In the adjoining room I found another visiting room that was built of nothing but two inch plexiglas windows and concrete bricks. In here there were three visiting stations. This room contained one chair which was placed next to a window which had three small holes in it head high when seated. These holes allowed voices to permeate, but prevented any physical contact between the visitor and the prisoner. I was glad Evelyn and Crystal weren't in this visiting room; it had a foreboding atmosphere of imminent doom.

I returned to Evelyn and Victor, and we left shortly thereafter. We dropped
Maria and Madeline off at their house. Maria spoke of plans for the next day, and Evelyn replied something. We then drove to Evelyn's.

Evelyn's mother sent her the money for the ticket. James was to be waiting at Evelyn's apartment for our return, but he was not there. Evelyn, Crystal, and James were planning to take the Greyhound Bus to New York City. We waited for James past the departure time of the bus. My instincts about him were proven correct, because he never appeared. I knew he really didn't want to go; I doubted his feelings for Evelyn all along. Crystal and Evelyn boarded the bus without James the following Wednesday; the day before Victor's release.

I rode with Maria, Cito, and Madeline to pick Victor up from jail. We arrived late to the police station, Victor had already been released, and he was waiting outside the building. When the van stopped he jumped in before anyone had a chance to get out. All the photographs I had envisioned taking were missed because everything happened so fast. We went back to Maria's house. After I made several photographs Victor asked me not to take any more. I respected his request, and photographed the other family members instead.

Later that night, while sitting at the kitchen table, Victor and Cito talked about stealing cars. Victor said he had made a connection in jail that could get him $1000 for any car he stole, no matter what shape, or model. He said he could get that money for my car, a 1974 Chevy Nova. It was worth $200 if I was lucky. I told him he could have the car, and we could split the money, and he wouldn't have to bother stealing it. I knew Victor's words reflected a power trip, a conversation that he and another prisoner had had. Yet, I was still amazed. Victor had just been released from jail, and he immediately talked about stealing again. All his promises to Evelyn about changing were all talk and not heartfelt.

At that time I wondered if something ran through his blood? Was something passed down to him genetically from his mother or father that provoked him to perform these compulsive acts. For the first act of theft he was caught at he narrowly escaped jail. He was imprisoned for four months for the second theft he was caught at, and still he talked about stealing again. Would this guy
ever learn his lesson? Would the plexiglassed visitation room be his next step?

I was glad Evelyn moved to New York City. The constant upheaval that
Victor would make them endure would be endless. Who knows when and if Victor
would become a responsible father?

Victor believed the rumors about James' and Evelyn's affair that went around
the neighborhood, and didn't let me photograph him after the night of his release.
He thought my loyalty was with Evelyn. Looking back, my loyalty was with Crystal
and Evelyn. I knew Crystal was a beautiful little girl whose father was a poor role
model, also I knew Evelyn had nobody to turn to in Rochester. Maria wasn't a true
friend of Evelyn's. (As a matter of fact, Evelyn felt Marie to be jealous of her
because she was taking Victor away from her.) Evelyn had very few friends that I
knew of. Yes, I knew about her relationship with James, but it wasn't my
responsibility, nor did I take it upon myself to tell Victor about it. I talked to him a
couple of times after his release, but he wasn't interested in my friendship, nor in
my thesis endeavor.

By the time Evelyn left for New York City I decided the topic of my
photographic essay would be, as I've stated, about the cyclical nature of poverty
and social illness in the lower economic class. Yet at the time of Evelyn's departure,
more photographs were needed to make the essay cohesive. I was between a rock
and a hard place- either I had to direct my attention on another subject and begin a
new thesis, or I had to visit Evelyn in New York, and continue to document her
story. This conclusion led Evelyn and me to make plans for my visit to her after
Thanksgiving.

A week before Thanksgiving Evelyn called me and told me that she and
Victor were talking about getting back together. She asked if I would pay for
Victor's plane ticket down, and she would reimburse me upon my arrival. I knew
Victor had broken parole a couple of weeks previously by going to Pennsylvania,
and also I would be aiding and abetting a criminal if I bought him a ticket. Victor's
presence wasn't needed for me to complete the essay. The story could have ended
with his abandonment of them both, but they wanted to be together, that was their
decision, and it's their story. The ticket was only $30. I loaned Victor the money, and we flew down together.

I went to New York City with two camera bodies, a 50 mm lens, a 28 mm lens, a flash, plenty of bulk-rolled Tri X, some 200 asa color film, a tape recorder, tapes, lots of AA batteries, and my journal that I had been keeping since April. I planned on interviewing everyone, photographing all the time, and writing in my journal, but of course this was idealistic thinking, and my journal was the task I ignored the most. There wasn't enough time in the day to do everything, and everyone was to be in bed at 11:00.

I was unaware that Mrs. Lucenta wasn't expecting Victor's arrival. Mrs. Lucenta exploded at Evelyn and Victor the first night of our arrival. While yelling she asked Victor if he was going to get a job. If they were going to get married? When were they planning on getting an apartment? As I found out more about Victor's history during the week I understood the meaning of her interrogation.

Most of the information conveyed in this essay was gathered on my adventure in New York City from interviews. (I actually learned more information than I'm comfortable about knowing.) The interview process was impromptu. I interviewed Mrs. Lucenta once, and Victor and Evelyn several times. Many times I let the tape player record while I wasn't in the room to acquire conversation that Mrs. Lucenta spoke to Crystal.

Mrs. Lucenta was very leery of the camera, and after I had taken a few photographs of her she refused to have any more taken. Unlike Victor's request (when he was released from jail) I didn't stop photographing her. I did it surreptitiously with a wide angle lens, or at times when I really wanted a photograph I took it, and paid the consequences of her scolding me.

I talked to Evelyn about the theme of my thesis later in the week. We talked about Victor, and his mother's effect on his life, during that conversation. Some of the interview went as follows:
Me: Do you think the reason that Victor and Norma [Victor's sister] are the way they are today could be because of Maria?

Evelyn: In my opinion yes. Because the first time Norma ran away Maria came here [Mrs. Lucenta's] when I was carrying Crystal, and my mother looked at her and said, "Your daughter ran away again, that's good for you because you don't know how to treat those kids." She said, "I don't know why God gave you so many kids you don't deserve them. You don't take them out to movies, to McDonald's. That ain't much, but the kids just want to know they're loved.

Me: That's understandable.

Evelyn: Maybe it was a problem in her past, or something when she was younger because she said her mother was the same way with her. But that would make me want to think that I would be a different way with my kids. But I look at her and say, "Ah, ah, not me like that with Crystal." because she'll end up running away like that or worse. Maybe it's something that came down her line.3

(This text appears in conjunction with the portrait of Crystal sitting in the hallway of the apartment building on Chili Avenue (slide #41).

During the interview Evelyn acknowledges that Victor's behavior might be attributable to his mother's actions while she raised him, and also inferred that Maria's behavior was influenced by her mother's.

The week went by quickly, and I shot a lot of film. The visit ended, and Victor, Evelyn, and Crystal saw me off at Grand Central Station. The immediate weeks following my return were spent developing the film, making contact prints,
and transcribing and editing the eight 90 minute interview tapes (an arduous task).
Once the layout of the essay, and the size of the prints were decided upon, all that
remained to be done was the printing of the essay.

THOUGHTS

From the very beginning, even while I was getting to know Victor, I realized
that the welfare system was a way of life for him and his family. His mother's family
and his sister's family were all on welfare. Upon thinking about this situation more
intensely I came to believe that a majority of the people in the lower economic
class are born into a social class that is potentially devastating, and obviously subject
to cyclical influences. I concluded that this occurs as a result of various reasons, the
major ones being: this group contributes to the perpetuation of its own existence
because of a poor value system passed down to succeeding generations, and
because of an element inherent to the system of capitalism.

A family develops a value system that governs their behavior, and this is
learned by the children. Given the inherent differences between human beings,
and also the fact that individual perceptions of similar experiences will differ, these
values will vary from family to family. If certain basic values aren't present within a
family's system, the lack of these could be detrimental to a child's start in life. For
example, if an education isn't highly regarded in the family then the probability of a
child acquiring a high school diploma diminishes.

Other reasons are external to the family unit. For example the system of
capitalism practiced by the United States. This suppresses the economically
depressed people by exploitation of them for the interests of those in control of
production. Production can infer anything such as the product of a factory, or that
of a restaurant. This system, as well as those people in society who are prejudiced
against poverty, can physically and psychologically induce the lower economic class
people to feel discouragement. This in turn, keeps them from trying to transcend
their situation. I believe both these ideas are representative of Victor's family
situation. His family's values instigated the continuance of the cycle of the lower economic social class within him, and capitalism provides the proper environment to promote its sustainment. These circumstances are passed down to Crystal, and they contribute to her reactions to events as she matures physically and mentally.

The following quote came from a documentary program on Channel 21, WXXI, titled "Focus On Society", which explored the issue of social class. "Social class--no other cultural aspect plays as an important role as social class. It forms your ideas, and your life patterns. It transcends ethical, religious, and cultural boundaries. It forms your view on how you look at the world." Victor, Evelyn, and Crystal are products of the social values they were exposed to while growing up in a lower economic class.

Another contributing factor to the continuance of the cycle is teenage pregnancy. Maria, Evelyn, and Victor became parents while teenagers. Teenage years are an important time of immense growth and change. When teenagers have children during this time, their maturity, and mental growth is stunted, and as a result their children's growth is stunted. In most cases pregnancy results in the parents having to quit school, and obtain welfare to support the family, and because of their lack of education, and skills they eventually have to obtain low paying jobs. This enormous responsibility is contradictory to what being a teenager represents; as adolescents they should be enjoying the lesser responsibilities of this time in life, not changing diapers, or working to bring home a paycheck to live a meager existence. In addition, at this age they haven't developed a philosophy regarding what parenting means, let alone having thought about the responsibilities that raising a child entails; as a result their children pay for their mistakes. This trap, set by themselves, manifests itself in various forms: resentment towards the children, mistreatment, neglect, abuse, and even abandonment of the children. If there is a lack of money, as is usually the case in lower economic families, it heightens the sense of adverse conditions.
I'm of the opinion that environment and upbringing have a lot to do with the attitude developed by a person, but, as I spent more time with Victor, I started to believe certain behaviors might be genetically inherited. I especially felt this at the time Victor was released from jail because of reasons I've already stated. The theme of Lou Reed's song "Endless Cycle" talks about inherited traits such as these.

"The bias of the father runs on through the son, and leaves him bothered and bewildered. The drugs in his veins only cause him to spit at the face staring back in the mirror. How can he tell a good act from bad, He can't even remember his name? How can he do what needs to be done when he's a follower not a leader? The sickness of the mother runs on through the girl leaving her small and helpless. Liquor flies through her brain with the force of a gun leaving her running in circles. How can she tell a good act from the bad when she's flat on her back in her room? How can she do what needs to be done when she's a coward and a bleeder? The man if he marries will batter his child, and have endless excuses. The woman will sadly do much the same thinking that it's right and its proper. Better than their Mommy or their Daddy did. Better than the childhood they suffered. The truth is they're happier when they're in pain. In fact, that's why they got married." 5

The song reflects on a way of life that's "endless". The "bias" and "sickness" runs through the "son" and "girl". These are traits inherited from their parents. The emphasis on whether these traits are running through their brains or their life feeding veins is vague, but it suggests the latter. Either way, these traits are controlling their lives; not very differently than Victor's and Evelyn's background circumstances and traits control theirs, and the way Crystal's inherited traits and circumstances will control hers. "...thinking that it's right and it's proper." What
other way is there when there is no other way known?

Victor doesn't know any other way to exist, stealing and drugs are a way of life. Victor was only 18 when I met him, but at times he acted younger, while at other times he seemed to be years older, not through his actions, but through the streetwise lifestyle attitude he projected. His childhood lifestyle laid burdens and weights on him that are almost impossible to remove. I think his innocence passed him by too quickly. He went right from being a boy without innocence to being a father of ignorance at age sixteen. This is a disheartening thought. I feel Crystal never had a chance to escape her fate before she was even born.

During the one week I spent photographing them in New York City I learned more about Evelyn's and Victor's background than I did in the nine months before. I don't know if my photographic approach changed while I was there, but it must have. I was hungry for visual information, and wasn't shy about getting it, if I saw a photograph I took it. Some things I shot more than once because of the different lenses and film I brought. One thing I am adamant about as a result of these activities; the cyclical nature of the lower economic class is constantly replenishing itself because of the difficulty in transcending the boundaries created by economic and psychologic factors. And when I feel weighed down by some miniscule problem of my own that seems enormous, I remind myself that there is always that one person who is that much worse off than I am. I shared the latter thought with Evelyn, and pointed out that with all her troubles at least she had a mother she could turn to, some people don't even have that.

Evelyn and Victor (especially Victor) are not going to undergo any drastic changes in their value system because of their lack of education. An education gives you alternatives, a new awareness. Otherwise they'll continue to mirror their own upbringing. The old saying "If it was good enough for me, it's good enough for my kids." is a fallacy, an easy way out from the responsibility parents have to their children. There is no learning involved on either the parents' part or the children's. Their parents' values will stay with them. Bruno Bettelheim states in his
book, *The Uses of Enchantment*, *The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, "Even the best of parents cannot be spontaneous in providing his child with what was absent from his own experience." The children would not have any growth except that which comes with age.

A solution for the discontinuance of the cycle is education. Not necessarily a formal education, but one that shows there are more viable alternative lifestyles than what was presented to them. An education is a valuable asset, and while doing this thesis I realized how much an education changes a person. The ideals and values that I learned from my mother and father have evolved; not just because of the age difference, but as a result of my education, and because of the people I've come in contact with while acquiring this learning. I can see this quite clearly in comparison with my sister who chose to be a housewife and a mother at an early age, then later on in life returned to school to earn an LPN degree. We have different ideals, especially regarding our philosophy on child raising. Her ways haven't transformed, they mirror my mother's, while mine have evolved.

**THESIS PROCESS**

When I showed my first photographs of Evelyn, Victor, and Crystal in graduate core class I told my peers that these people were my friends. I truly felt this, and still do. Although the class' reception to these photographs was cold, I felt very excited about them. Most of them were unable, or unwilling to enter the work, or even the realm of documentary photography. As I've stated, the primary function of these first photographs was to be the preliminary step in creating a documentary essay. A photographic essay takes time and nurturing, like any other art, to form a cohesive thought. I attribute the student's apathy to the fact that most of them were trying to define themselves in the realm of "fine art photography". Also, as most of their backgrounds were in something else other than photography their vocabulary in this genre was still very limited.

In my opinion, creating fine art photography (as with all fine art) is self-indulgent, and if you categorize yourself as a fine artist, this is, in essence,
categorizing yourself as an elitist. It has been that way throughout history. Documentary photography is a fine art, but I feel documentary photography brings the artist down from the elitist position to that of a human being. At least, that is the effect the documentary process had on me. I had to interact and relate to people on their own terms. This process didn't lift me up on a pedestal, on the contrary, it made me feel vulnerable to the pitfalls of life that befell Evelyn and Victor.

Not until after I explained some background information concerning the people in the photographs, and about the specific event depicted in each photograph were my classmates able to critique them. For example, in the photograph of Victor and Evelyn standing in the entrance doorway of their apartment building on Chili Avenue (slide #4), their names "Victor and Evelyn", were written in red spray paint on the brick wall behind them. Victor wrote this on the wall. Once this particular information in the photo was revealed to my peers, it gave them insight to Victor's character. The photograph then became interesting, and they were able to enter into a conversation about it.

This necessity to explicate the imagery provoked me to examine the relevance of words in a documentary essay. An image can convey an idea, and if it is juxtaposed with another image this could further expound on the original idea, or construct another idea. But, in order to know specific information about an image, words are necessary to fill in the details, to give the photo a context: name, date, place, some information to let the viewer know what he/she is viewing. This led to my decision to include text in my essay. (Copy of the text is located at the end of thesis book.) The text was drawn from the interviews made while I was in New York City.

The most important aspect required of my thesis board was that I receive diverse feedback. Each member needed to contribute information particular to their own vision. When I started my photographic endeavors Charles Werberg was supportive of my working in this genre. When Charles resigned from teaching Graduate Core I felt abandoned. (I was ostracized from him further when it was declared he couldn't be a board member for any first year graduate student.) Ken
White became the professor of the graduate core class. Although he acknowledged his specialty wasn't in this genre, he encouraged me to keep working to produce more work. Ken saw my work evolve from the outset. Because of this I decided he would be the most appropriate chairperson of my board. Grant Romer, Conservator at the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, was very accessible and supportive, and offered very valuable insight when critiquing my work. He became my second board member. The third person on my board took a long time to find. The board members I had chosen were professors of mine from previous courses, and easy choices to make, but I wasn't comfortable enough with anyone else from other previous courses to ask them. Besides, I needed someone with a personal connection to the documentary genre to acquire input in this aspect. Documentary photography as an alternative form of expression had been overlooked as part of the curriculum structure in the graduate program at RIT. Nobody on the graduate staff had this background, no one acknowledged that they were experienced in the process of making a documentary essay. (Or at least the graduate class wasn't introduced to any one.)

After inquiring further I came across names of professors in the undergraduate program that practiced this genre. One of which was Jim MaGargee. He consented to be the third member of my board and proved very instrumental in the development of my thesis in the final stages.

I imagine some people relied more heavily on advice from their board than I did, although their input was valuable to me. They primarily encouraged me to continue, and made me feel that my energies weren't wasted, but on the contrary were meaningful. I was confident (maybe overly so) throughout the photographic process, and knew what images were needed to attain a cohesive essay. I attribute this confidence to my previous experience in this genre. Yet, I held the least faith in myself when the layout decision needed attention. Deciding the size of the images, and their sequencing, ultimately determined the essay's final outcome. This process was undertaken with the help of Jim MaGargee. At that time, I felt very comfortable with the final decisions made, but while writing this paper (three years
later) I feel I would have excluded some images, included others, or maybe even change the whole format all together.

**THESIS LAYOUT**

*LIFE, LOOK, and Vu* Magazines developed, fine tuned, and validated the documentary essay as an art form. They used the following devices to express meaning when composing an essay: the juxtaposition of various sized photographs, image content, composition, alternating light and dark photos generating a rhythm, and words to narrate the subject. All these features are apparent in the essay "Spanish Village" by Eugene Smith which appeared in *LIFE* on April 9, 1951. This essay was a collaborative effort between Smith, the photographer, and Bernhardt Quint, the designer.

"Spanish Village" was a major breakthrough in the use of layout and design to emphasize an idea. With lightness of both print tone and subject, the beginning of the essay eludes to a peaceful, spiritual sensitivity. A darkness overshadows this quietness with the introduction of Franco's soldiers. By alternating light and dark imagery, this rhythm continues eventually ending with the blackest scene, death. Meaning is also achieved by the juxtaposition of larger images of Franco's soldiers to smaller images of the village people, implying the domination of this regime over the people, therefore creating an essay that is a political statement. Yet, in this essay no two images are the same dimension, which emphasizes the individuality of each image. Some of these images are beautiful in form and content apart from the essay. For example, "The Spinner" functions singularly because of the wonderful form created by the woman's body and gesture, and feelings invoked in the viewer by the atmosphere which is presented in the photograph. Yet, this image loses its true meaning when not viewed in its intended context. Those people familiar with the essay are able to use this image as a reference to elicit the emotions and intent of Eugene Smith, all others are left confronted by a wonderful photograph without realizing its true significance. In this case, the work of art is the essay, not the individual images within the essay.
"Spanish Village" was the biggest influence on the outcome of the layout of my essay. I used some of its illustrating devices as guidelines for my own work. I wanted my work to imitate a layout in a magazine. This desire created complications because I could not financially afford to have a magazine, or even a pamphlet printed, therefore the traditional method of displaying photographs on the wall was my only option. I decided to put the images behind glass, without mats or frames. I did not want mats or frames because they would impart an aura of preciousness. The magazine format breaks away from this feeling by allowing the viewer to hold the object/images in his/her hands. I printed the photographs full frame with black borders; the white edge of the photographic paper functioned as the page edge. The prints varied from 5" x 7" through 16" x 20".

Over a period of one year I shot approximately 75 rolls of 36 exposure film. From this the final essay was edited to 43 images, both black and white and color.

As I've stated, the interviews with Evelyn, Victor, and Mrs. Lucenta functioned as the text for the essay, and this text was placed next to the images on the wall. The text explained pertinent history about them as individuals and described the relationships between them. Since the text is in their own words, it enhances the fact that this is their story, and not a story fabricated by me.

The essay was laid out in a series of sequences that presented relationships, and their effect on each person within them. For example the relationship between Crystal and Evelyn, and theirs with people in their environment. The images are not in chronological order from the day I first started photographing, on the contrary, they're intermixed. I juxtaposed photographs together to make the essay say what I saw existed within the lower economic class, or more specific, what existed within the lives of Victor, Evelyn, and Crystal. In essence, I directed what the viewer interpreted. (This latter statement raised a conflicting issue within me. Isn't this a form of propaganda? Isn't this how Hitler used the films he had made for the German people's morale during World War II? The power of a photograph, and its capabilities to distort or misconstrue meaning makes me feel uncomfortable, but I'm not trying to use this essay as propaganda, nor to
misconstrue information. I'm just using the photograph as an educational tool to show to those who don't acknowledge this lifestyle exists, and to explain why it does.) The essay format allowed me the greatest freedom to do this because of its inherent quality that its read like a story. As I refer to the essay and text I am not going to explicate each image's connection to another image, but the logic and emotions behind some will be explained. (Slides of the photographs, and their text are in the back, and the reader can refer to them.)

The first image that confronts the viewer is a 16" x 20" photograph of a women; which implies the essay is about her, or begins with her. In correlation, the text introduces her as Evelyn, and informs the viewer of the background of her relationship with her biological mother. But, more importantly, it informs the viewer that her mother's decision to give Evelyn her own last name, and omit Evelyn's biological father's name from her birth certificate provoked Evelyn to do the same with Crystal. I found this action to be the first example of Evelyn mirroring an elder's example in her own daughter's life.

The next sequence introduces Evelyn's relationship with Victor, and then, in turn, their relationship together with Crystal. At this point in the text, the backgrounds and attitudes of both Victor and Evelyn begin to be revealed. While interviewing them I inquired where marriage stood in their lives, or had they even thought about it. They stated they had thought about it when Victor was in prison. Evelyn stated that while she visited Victor in prison the priest's comment, "You [can] start your life together or apart." kept her from marrying at that time. During the interview Victor stated, "He would soon." (be willing to get married.) I inquired how he would obtain a marriage certificate having broken parole. He claimed he would run from the police for seven years, the statue of limitations, after which he would be free to do what he wanted without the authorities coming after him. In other words, he would get married in seven years.

The conversation about marriage revealed important information regarding Victor's attitude towards his relationship with both Evelyn and Crystal. He didn't consider how his actions would affect his family, or himself. It reflected his
previous behavior towards them at the time he stole cars to make a living, and at the time he took off when Crystal was born. Victor's attitude and behavior hadn't changed; he still wasn't ready to be responsible.

The relationships between Mrs. Lucenta, Evelyn, Victor, and Crystal are presented next. I tried to show the peculiarities of each relationship; and how each affects another relationship. Mrs. Lucenta was a major influence in Evelyn's life. She experienced the ins and outs of Victor's and Evelyn's relationship. Evelyn relied on Mrs. Lucenta when Victor was undependable, as she supported Evelyn throughout her pregnancy while Victor wasn't around. Mrs. Lucenta's resentment (and eventually hatred) for Victor affected the way she treated Evelyn, especially after Evelyn reentered the same relationship with Victor, and also because Evelyn ignored how her actions affected Crystal. Mrs. Lucenta felt great disappointment, as well as anger towards Evelyn because Crystal was not given a steady environment to grow up in. I tried to depict the tension and the distance between Evelyn, Victor, and Mrs. Lucenta which was created by the irresponsibility of both Victor and Evelyn. As suggested in the photograph of all of them in the kitchen (slide #13), even when they were all together in one room they were in separate realms; estranged from each other by their differences.

Yet, Mrs. Lucenta was a women of great compassion and love; she's shown this to Evelyn throughout her life, and she shows this to Crystal. The photographs displaying Crystal's and Mrs. Lucenta's relationship reveal the gentleness Mrs. Lucenta is capable of, but which she doesn't outwardly show, especially to Evelyn at this time.

In this sequence the question is posed whether or not Victor will be like his father, and continue the cycle. Will he abandon his parental obligation towards Crystal altogether, or in the very least be a poor role model? Victor's and Crystal's relationship is introduced next. The image of Victor pulling on Crystal's shirt as she stands behind the "bars" of the staircase railing (slide #14) infers that Victor's actions will influence her development to closely resemble his.

The major part of the essay emphasizes the relationship between Evelyn and
Crystal. Undoubtedly, Evelyn will be the most influential person in Crystal's life during her developmental years, and Crystal will respond to, and be affected by, the friends Evelyn seeks out for relationships, whether they are male or female.

In the first image depicting Evelyn's relationship with Crystal (slide #18) Evelyn is reaching down for Crystal, who is in the lower left corner reaching up for Evelyn. The blurriness of their reaching gestures caused by their movement and the fact that they're not connecting portrays an uneasiness. The darkness of the image, and their long reaching gestures suggests how much they depend on each other, but also the weightiness of their situations: Evelyn's total responsibility for Crystal, and Crystal's total reliance on Evelyn. The text with this image tells about a specific time in life, when adolescents deny the wisdom of their parents. "But then again, we all got to find out on our own. She'll [Mrs. Lucenta] say one thing, and I'll say, "No, just because it happened to you it's not going to happen to me," and it does, but it happens in a different way. And she'll say, "I told you, but you never listen." "Well...you find out on your own." 8 Through hindsight, Evelyn realized the erroneous way of adolescent thinking. Collectively, the photograph and text question whether Evelyn's present situation will be the same for Crystal in the future. As this is the main theme of the essay, I wanted this statement emphasized, therefore this image was printed 16" x 20".

Other images depicting their relationship were printed 11" x 14" to emphasize the pressure Evelyn felt from raising Crystal by herself. A single mother needs endurance to handle the pressure that results from the responsibility of raising a child alone. Evelyn possessed only those skills required to operate a cash register, therefore her job opportunities were few, and she depended on Social Services for them to eat, to have shelter, to buy the essentials to exist in a very limited capacity.

Even though there is tension in their lives as a result of their extreme situation, the relationship of Crystal and Evelyn was special, as a relationship between a mother and daughter could be. They depended on each other for love and comfort. I tried to illustrate this quality through the photograph of Evelyn holding and swinging Crystal in her arms (slide #19). Evelyn's body is the stability
needed by Crystal to levitate her almost weightless body in the air. They're both laughing, having fun and enjoying the special moment between them. Yet, when viewed in conjunction with the larger prints depicting their relationship, the small 5" x 7" size of the print, deemphasises the role of this behavior in their lives.

The photograph of the tangled doll laying on the floor in the corner (slide #26) is self explanatory, simply by the emotion evoked from the viewer. It represents a darkness representing the situation that Crystal was born into. She is limited or influenced by her surroundings, and her chances of breaking out of the cycle are very small. All the fates were against her before she was born.

The essay then progresses into the relationships that both Crystal and Evelyn have with people from their environment; more people that will affect Crystal's attitudes while she grows and learns. This sequence depicts Evelyn's innate desire to find happiness for herself through her search for friendships, a different neighborhood, and a new boyfriend/husband. Crystal will receive comfort from some of these people, and she might turn to them in the future, for example Victor's sister (slide #29). However, she might also repeat the good or bad behavior of others, her peers in the neighborhood as she grows (slide #28). The implication inferred in the photographs depicting these relationships is that these people will play a role in helping the cycle continue, because they are from the same environment.

After this sequence, I return to a photograph of Evelyn and Crystal to emphasize how these outside relationships effect their relationship. This photograph shows Evelyn and Crystal alone, yet together. Evelyn is sitting in a corner on a barrel, hunched over and looking down. Crystal seems oblivious to her limited surroundings, as well as to Evelyn. By printing this photograph 16" x 20" I imply, and emphasize, that in the end all they have is each other.

To emphasize the cyclical theme it was important to end the essay with a picture of Crystal, and the 11" x 14" image of Crystal sitting on the floor in a hallway is the final photograph (slide #41). In some respect the photograph poses a question, in another it makes an emphatic statement. Crystal is at the end of the
circle (which I created in the gallery with the photographs.) Is she beginning the circle again? This is a question that only time will tell.

PROBLEMS

One major problem which I had to contend with was that I had used both black and white and color photographs to create the essay. When this endeavor started I wanted, almost needed, this body of work to be in color. (I set this as a goal, but didn't follow through.) When I returned to Rochester, after having been gone for the summer, I photographed with black and white film because I wasn't happy working with color. Before leaving for New York City, Jim Magargee and I compared the two types of photographs, and decided there was a psychological presence in the black and white prints that wasn't present in the color work. The effect that color had on the composition of the photograph, and thereby on the meaning of the photographs was important. And this issue didn't need to be addressed when photographing with black and white film. I also felt that color made everything too real; the reality of the situation was enough to endure without looking at it in Kodak color. The solution to the problem was to shoot in black and white film, but there were some important images from the first stage of shooting that needed to be included, that were in color, and that could not be reshot. For example, the image of Victor and Evelyn standing by the wall with graffiti on it and the shot of Crystal sitting in the hallway. This prompted me to shoot in both color and black and white while in New York City.

For the most part, it was purely accidental which images ended up in color or as black and white. I don't know if I was totally successful integrating the two types of prints together, but mixing them didn't bother me, nor was there any extreme opinion from anyone else on this matter either way.
CONCLUSION

The essay argues that the lower economic class is caught in a cyclical pattern. The essay's major purpose is to raise awareness of this issue, and not to offer solutions that could alleviate the process, although I believe education and instinct assists in the transcendence of this lifestyle. What awareness did I come to? Mainly that I really don't believe there are any immediate permanent solutions to end the cyclical nature of the lower economic class. Our system of capitalism dictates that there will always be poverty. Unless there is mass education and the elimination of poverty there will always be situations such as Victor's, Evelyn's, and Crystal's.

I've talked to Evelyn quite a few times since the culmination of my thesis show. The last I heard was that she was employed at a drug store working the cash register, and Mrs. Lucenta watches Crystal while she works. Evelyn started dating another man. Victor lives in Rochester, and I haven't talked to him since I left New York City.

I'm sure the question sitting on the tip of your tongue is what does all of this have to do with me? I was raised in a one parent household where money was scarce. I don't pretend to believe my situation resembled Victor's and Evelyn's, theirs is an extreme. My friends tell me that this paper and my thesis itself proves that my cyclical hypothesis isn't true. My rebuttal to them is that there is always an exception to everything. Because my photographic work usually revolved around issues that were relevant to me in my life, I feel my thesis is a reflection of similar issues I've dealt with.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Lucenta, Mrs.. Personal Interviews, December 1986.


NOTES


3. Ibid.


TEXT

(opening statement)

"...because social issues should be addressed."

Mary Travers
(Peter, Paul, and Mary)

My intention for these photographs is to show an issue that manifests itself in the lower social class. For me, as the photographer, these images are talking about the lower social class and their cyclical nature. By this I mean the inherent conditions of the lower social class, such as: little inspiration to work, a muted value system that inhibits growth, and no figure head to show alternative means for achievement, are passed on to each generation.

This issue is depicted through the events and actions of one family. While making these photographs they became my trusted friends, and I theirs.

On a smaller level, this body of work is showing the relationships within one family, and whereby the cyclical issue arises. The essay begins with the relationship between Evelyn Diaz and her daughter's father, Victor Rivera. Then it depicts their individual relationship with their daughter, Crystal Diaz, and with Evelyn's mother, Carmella Lucenta. And finally, it shows the inevitable establishment of relationships outside the family; the different types, and their results. These people are catalysts that breath life into, if I may use the term loosely, a “catch-22 situation.

These photographs are not meant to be seen as a chronological ordering of events, but are used to depict what I have stated above.

I would like to thank all my professors and teachers who I have studied with, Bill, all my friends and family who have supported me throughout this endeavor, and especially Evelyn, Victor, Crystal, and Mrs. Lucenta; without them this body of work could not exist. Thank you very much.
(slide #46)

Cathy: Evelyn what I wanted to ask you, your last name is Diaz, were you named before you came to New York?

Evelyn: Under my mother's name.

Cathy: Under your real mother's name?

Evelyn: Because my father's name isn't on my birth certificate at all. Like Crystal too.

Cathy: So where does your mother live, your real mother?

Evelyn: She's in Puerto Rico.

Cathy: So she came here?

Evelyn: No, that was my grandmother and my step sister.

Cathy: But I mean she had you here?

Evelyn: Yeah in Brooklyn.

Cathy: Then she moved back to Puerto Rico?

Evelyn: Uh huh.

(Evelyn Diaz was born March 10, 1966.)

(slides #47)

Cathy: When did you meet, at what age?

Victor: '83, I was sixteen, she was eighteen.

Evelyn: Eighteen!

Victor: Yeah because you're twenty now.

Evelyn: I wasn't eighteen.

Victor: Yeah because you were always two years older than me...You were always a year older than me.

Evelyn: I was seventeen at that time. I got pregnant for Crystal...

Victor: ...When you were nineteen.

(Victor Rivera was born December 25, 1967. Crystal Diaz was born April 5, 1985.)
(slide #48)

Cathy: Have you and Victor ever talked about marriage?
Evelyn: We talked and all. We were supposed to be married in jail, but I did not want to because of no people, no camera, no cake, no nothing. You just sit in a room for an hour or half-hour or so.
Cathy: And no honeymoon.
Evelyn: No Honeymoon.
(we both laugh)
Evelyn: The priest explained to me, in a nice way, he told me, “Either you can start your life either like this, that when you get married he goes back to jail and you go to the outside world, or you can wait until you get on the outside, and you can start your life together instead of separate.” He said, “Don’t let me influence your decision, but this is what I tell everybody who is willing to get married in jail. You start your life together, or you start it apart.”

(Victor was sent to jail for four months (July through October of 1986) for accessory to robbery of a small corner store in Rochester. Once out of jail he was put on probation, which he broke one month later.)

(slide #49)

Cathy: What do you think about marriage Victor?
Victor: I’m not too thrilled about it, but I might as well in the future. Soon in the future.
Evelyn: Crystal says no way. I’m not going to be under Rivera. I’m staying under Diaz.
Victor: Uh huh, just as soon as I get out of here.
Cathy: If you ever tried to get married wouldn’t they find out because you would have to apply for a license?
Victor: Who find out?
Cathy: The authorities.
Victor: I use me another name.
Cathy: You would what?
Victor: Another name. I don't think they ask for birth certificates. They ask for birth certificates when you get married?
Evelyn: Yes.
Cathy: Do you think you'll try to straighten out the mess?
Victor: After seven years it will be straightened out.
Cathy: Oh really. Then you would have to run for seven years; that would be okay? Could you do it?
Victor: Yeah I could do it.

(slide #49)
Cathy: How old was he [Victor] when he started stealing cars?
Evelyn: I would say when she [Crystal] was born he started that.
Cathy: And he brought home a lot of money?
Evelyn: No, my mother would strangle him. My mother wouldn't allow it. That's what made my pregnancy rough because thinking about him out on the street. And from the time I was pregnant carrying toward the end, like about the fifth or sixth month with her, my mother told me ya' know out with Victor. He went to Rochester with his mother. A couple of months later he disappears. His mother called and said, "He's down there [Queens]." I said, "Well, I don't know where he is. He hasn't contacted me." I asked all his friends, "Where is Victor?" I don't know, I don't know, [but] everyone knew. And I told them, "Well if you see him tell him to come see Evelyn, or give me a call." When he came back to me I didn't recognize him. It was after she was born he came back to me. He came to see her in the hospital, and that was the last I seen of him. When he did come over my mother had went to the doctor's that morning. I said, "Damn." I looked at him and I-I was shocked. He came in, and picked Crystal
up. [I said,] “Tell me what’s going on?” He said, “No, I’ll be back later.” He never came back. A couple of days later I got a call from the detective at the police station. He said, “Do you know Victor Rivera?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Can you come up to the 103rd precinct?”

Cathy: That was when he got caught stealing cars?

(slide #50)

Cathy: How was your relationship [Victor's and Mrs. Lucenta's] after that [fight].

Victor: Just arguing ever since the beginning.

Cathy: Now that was during the time that you were living here [Mrs. Lucenta's]?

Victor: Same way, same way.

Cathy: I mean, was that the time you were living her for six months? So when you found out [that you were pregnant], Ev, that's when Victor moved in.

Victor: I left after I found out she was pregnant.

Evelyn: yeah, and for that I could have killed him.

(Evelyn and Victor got into a fight while she was six months pregnant. Mrs. Lucenta got involved. She said Victor hit both her and Evelyn. He states he only held Mrs. Lucenta down by the arms.)

(slide #51)

Victor: She [Mrs. Lucenta] don't show her love to no one.

Evelyn: She shows it to Crystal.

Victor: That's the only person she shows it to.

(slide #52)

Mother: I don't want him here.
Cathy: Victor?
Mother: I don't want him here.
Cathy: Maybe he'll get a job.
Mother: He won't stick around. He'll send his mother the money. He did the last time. He made a postal order. His mother got a hold of the money over there [Rochester]. He eats and sleeps. He don't want to know nothing. I want him to get on welfare. Try to get them out that's it. That's what I want to do.

(full page text (size 11" x 14") after slide #53, no installation view)
Cathy: Do they argue all the time?
Mother: Yeah they do, they do. I told her [Evelyn] she should really give him up. I told her. She had a nice fella' [her ex-boyfriend Gene] before he [Victor] came out, and he [Gene] said, "I'll marry you." He [Victor] never marries her. He's [Victor's] got her [Crystal], "Oh I'll marry you, I'll marry you." He never marries her. His mother don't want him to what cha' call? He breaks everything he owns. He breaks everything. That's why I said she should let him go. I wouldn't bother with him. When she gave birth she begged him. She begged him. His mother can't afford to talk. She [Evelyn] had $600 when she went to work at McDonalds at night time, and she didn't come in until 2:00-2:30 in the morning. I used to go pick her up. He heard that she was working. He came and stayed here. It's disgraceful ya' know what I mean? I said, "Evelyn this is not going to be." [Evelyn said,] "I love him, I love him." How can you love a guy like this? What could he give you? He can't give you nothing. He went to criminal court here on Queens Boulevard. I don't know what he did, and she went there. She begged. She had her [Crystal], and she was small, and she went and carried her. That day was cold. I'll never forget that day. I said, "Evelyn leave the baby here." [Evelyn said.] "No, she's coming with
me!" So I went with her on the other side of Jamaica [south of Queens]. Then he was on probation. He talked to her so. He talked to her till she has the baby in her arms going up to Rochester. Then she got on the welfare. I said to her you're crazy. I wouldn't want him. I don't want him for nothing. Even if he had a million dollars I wouldn't want him. I said go to work and you'd be ahead of the game. What do you want him for? Then his sister started calling and calling and calling, and they [Victor and his mother Maria] accused her she was with this somebody else. She was with nobody. And his mother said she'll disgrace her. I'll show her something. That dirty good for nothing slob. She's a slob.

Cathy: Who?

Mother: His mother. Thank God I got respect everybody. I got married one man. I don't go after nobody. I can't understand this. His mother must have cursed them good. His mother she's no good.

Mother: A lot of times she [Evelyn] got beaten up, beaten from him. Yeah! I told her she should call the cops and have him arrested, but she said, "No, I love him, I love him." You love him! Why do you love him? What do you see in him? He hasn't got no job, he's on parole. What kind of guy is he? I wouldn't want him. She loves him, huh! He beats her up you ought to see it. I'll never forget one night I was sleeping, [and was woken, and] I said, "What's going on here?" He had her in the closet beating the shit out of her. Boy you'd a seen what I didn't do to him. That's right, and I called the cops. He'll do it again. Don't you see how he's starting again? He'll do it again. Everybody thinks he's an angel. All feel sorry for him. I don't feel sorry. I know what he is. She's trying to talk to him. What good is it trying to talk to him? His mind is made up. He had to call somebody! He must have been with other girls too before he came here!
Cathy: Your mother was definitely interested if Victor was going back with his old friends. Do you think they're still around?

Evelyn: Oh, they're still around. You'll find them anywhere. When he came down here [to New York City from Rochester after she had Crystal] the first time that's how he made a mistake. Of going back with his old friends. All of a sudden they started calling, and he got himself in big trouble, but the judge went soft on him. It was a lady judge. She seen the baby she couldn't resist her because he walked in the court with the carriage and everything. She said, "Your case is up. " She said, "I'll let you go on one condition. That you raise your daughter not to be like you are today. Raise your daughter to be a decent person to work for her living." And he was out. But the judge in Rochester wasn't so nice even though she was a lady. Nope, four months that's the limit.

Mother: Why she [Crystal] got so excited?
Evelyn: Because she seen us [Victor and Evelyn] yelling at each other.
Mother: What are you yelling at each other for?
Evelyn: 'Cause I got mad.
Mother: Forget it. Don't start all over again, yeah, please.
Evelyn: I'm not he just found something he wasn't suppose to find.
Mother: What he find something?
Evelyn: A little paper that says, "Evelyn loves George." I wrote it inside a book of matches.
Mother: "Love George", what is this? What is this?
Evelyn: I just wrote it down one day playing.
Mother: So what is this for playing, so what is?
Evelyn: He got mad.
Mother: Too bad about him. Tell him how many girls he had before was here. Huh, you tell me. Listen, I don't believe none of these guys.

(slide #54)
Cathy: What happened to Victor's father?
Evelyn: They said that he left.
Cathy: And they haven't seen him since? How old was Victor?
Evelyn: He used to go back and visit, but after a while...

(slides # 18 and 19, missing installation view)
Evelyn: But then again we all got to find out on our own. She'll [Mrs. Lucenta] say one thing, and I'll say, "No, Just because it happened to you it's not going to happen to me." And it does, but it happens to me in a different way. And she'll say, "I told you, but you never listen." Well..., you find out on your own.

(slide #57)
A conversation while looking at a photo album at Mrs. Lucenta's home.)
Cathy: You left here [Mrs. Lucenta's home] at twelve, moved out of here at twelve?
Evelyn: That was when I was sixteen. These are my friends from the second home I was in. When I had met Victor.
Cathy: Why did you leave here? Why did you go live in another home?
Evelyn: I would not go to school.
Cathy: So they took you away?
Evelyn: Yeah, they gave me so many chances I didn't believe it. When the day came to pick me up I said, "I'm going to school." They said, "No, it's too late."
Cathy: How long were you in the other homes?
Evelyn: About close to four years in the first home. The second one about two or three.

Cathy: You left when you were?
Evelyn: Twelve.

Cathy: And you came back when you were sixteen?
Evelyn: About sixteen [or] seventeen. It was seventeen when I came back.

(Mother: Can't ya' go up there and get on the welfare in, what cha' call it, Rochester?
Evelyn: I don't want to go back to Rochester.
Mother: What about Pennsylvania?
Evelyn: No!

Mother: No? How about Albany, start a new life there?
Evelyn: I don't know nobody over there.

Mother: How about Jersey?
Evelyn: I don't know nobody. Moomyyyy ya' gotta' know....

Mother: No, I mean you go there and tell them you got no place to go. You come back from Rochester, and you have no money at all—could you put us up?
Evelyn: Yeah, they make you sleep in the office like they did in Jamaica [Jamaica, New York, south of Queens].

Mother: They make you sleep in the office?
Evelyn: Uh huh.

Mother: How can they make you sleep in the office?
Evelyn: Because they have an emergency assistance unit there. They make you sleep there.

Mother: Oh.
Evelyn: All the hotels are full. Everybody is on welfare down here!

Mother: Maybe this way he'll [Victor] have a chance. They'll send him to
school for work and everything.

Evelyn: He's got a chance over here, McDonalds or Keyfoods is hiring.

(slide #59)
Evelyn: Now she's [Crystal] nice and calm, but you wait.

(slide #63)
Cathy: Your Grandmother from Peurto Rico, that was your real grandmother, your...
Evelyn: They say no. They say that's his second, that's not my mother's real mother. That's his second wife.
Cathy: His second wife?
Evelyn: Yeah.
Cathy: Your grandfather's second wife?
Evelyn: Yeah.

(slide #65, missing installation view, slides #38 and 39)
(While Victor was in jail Evelyn was hoping that his attitude would change, but she didn't think it did. She wanted security, which Victor didn't give her, and she began to look elsewhere, first James in Rochester then George in Pennsylvania...)
Cathy: So you haven't heard from James yet?
Evelyn: No.
Cathy: Nothing? He just left that once and hasn't come back? James said he would call after Thanksgiving and that was that?
Evelyn: Uh huh, I've heard nothing.
Cathy: Does Victor know about...
Evelyn: He knows of him.

(slide #65, missing installation view, slides #40 and 41)
Cathy: Do you think the reason that Victor and Norma [Victor's sister] are
the way they are today could be because of Maria? [Victor's mother]

Evelyn: In my opinion, yes. Because the first time Norma ran away Maria came here [Mrs. Lucenta's] when I was carrying Crystal and my mother looked at her and said, “Your daughter ran away because you don't know how to treat those kids.” She said, “I don't know why God gave you so many kids you don't deserve them. You don't take them out to movies, [or] to McDonalds. That ain't much, but the kids just want to know they're loved.”

Cathy: That's understandable.

Evelyn: Maybe it was a problem that she [Maria] had in her past, or something when she was younger because she [Maria] said her mother was the same way with her, but that would make me think that I would be a different way with my kids, but I look at her and I say ah ah not me like that with Crystal because she'll end up running away like that or worse. Maybe it's something that came down her line.