

MATT BLACK, from page 9

J.Z.: *I can't help but be reminded of the photography of Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein 80 years ago, documenting the poverty of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Surely there are parallels to be drawn with this project.*

M.B.: What I think is the real difference is the level of inequality. This is not the result of a general depression that has hit all segments of society. This represents a separation, a kind of cleaving of our country into at least two different parts. That gap is, to a certain extent, self-inflicted and the result of conscious policies, and a deliberate series of steps have been made. I don't think I'm political, and I'm not trying to make a policy statement here, but I think that is the big difference.

J.Z.: *When you were out there, did you see innovations in dealing with poverty? Did you see the mothers of invention?*

M.B.: So much of that. It's hard to cite those things without them seeming small or that I'm treating them ungraciously, but it really is true that in each one of these places – the people I met along the way – there is a strong sense of pride. And a sense of history. A place like Flint (Mich.), for example, that has this incredible history, and played this incredible role, you can still see that. I spent a lot of time in a soup kitchen on the south side of Flint. Two things stood out: One, that it was completely diverse ethnically. It was a total mix, on both sides: those being served and those serving. There was a real sense that we're in this together. And in a lot of these places, the exact same thing. People, regardless of how things are, this is home. That's something I feel very strongly, too. I know exactly where that feeling's coming from.

There were very few places where the dominant feeling was hopelessness.

J.Z.: *Did you feel that these places will be restored? Did anything give you hope they would be?*

M.B.: The problems are real. The bottom line is the way income in this country is distributed has got to change. Otherwise this is just a bunch of platitudes. The hope that I'm trying to convey is right there in the work. It's self-evident. The fact that I'm photographing that, and I'm getting a reaction, and people care, for me that's the hope. It's demonstrable. If no one really cared, then no one would be interested at all in the pictures. I think it would be silly to say that change is right around the corner. It's going to take some pretty tough action to get this thing back to where we feel like it's an even playing field.

J.Z.: *What were your impressions of Oregon? You ended your trip on the coast here.*

M.B.: Yeah, in Coos Bay. It felt really connected to what I had been seeing on the way up, from across the plains. I was already tuned in to this idea of how communities are based on natural resources, and about how much of that wealth gets left behind after those (resources) are gone. That's what I was seeing on the North Coast (in Oregon): great natural wealth that's not being distributed to the people who live there. In Oregon I saw the aftermath, along the coast in these mill towns. There's not much left. And when you think about the value in that timber and all these resources that were extracted, it makes you wonder. The same thing happened along the coast with the decline of the fishing industry.

J.Z.: *Have you received any blowback, from people asking why you are taking pictures of the worst conditions?*

M.B.: I got much less than I thought (I would). I think it was pretty clear what the intention was. I got more of the opposite, which was, "Hey, you should come to my town. How come you didn't come here? We have the same thing."

You can view Matt Black's complete Geography of Poverty series at www.geographyofpoverty.com

Untitled

by Joe M.

my birth certificate is gone,
I have no way to prove I'm born
and I'm thinking, I'm figuring;
maybe – maybe I wasn't

The Dreams of a World Traveler

by Maddy Brown-Clark

Something that brings me joy and beauty is traveling by way of books like National Geographic and travel books. I might never get to actually go to these places, but can go there in my mind. And I become a world traveler, roaming the beaches of life, picking up little pieces of driftwood and sea shells cast ashore by sea and wind. One woman's debris is another woman's treasure. And literally. This is because they said I'd never be OK again mentally or physically. But I stand again I think again, and I travel. I just have to dream beautiful dreams.



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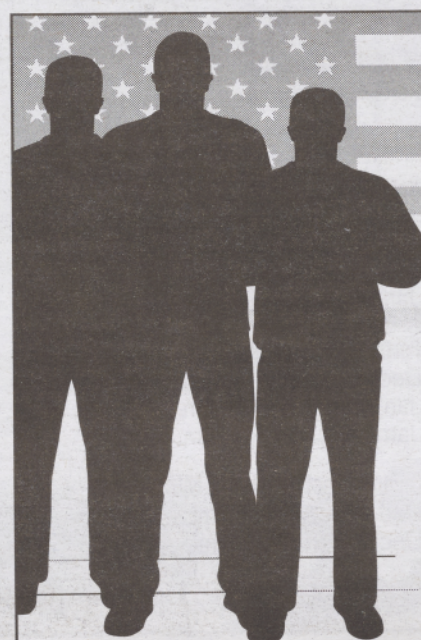
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