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Photographer Hansel Mieth (1909-1998) vividly documented pivotal cultural events of twentieth-century America. As an amateur photographer, she recorded her life among itinerant farm workers in California during the Great Depression. As a staff photographer for *Life* magazine, she created memorable photographic essays, as well as portraits of famous people such as Albert Einstein and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. She also created enduring portraits of ordinary people who have come to symbolize important social transformations. These photographs include her version of the visual icon “Rosie the Riveter” and a series of photographs of Japanese Americans interned during World War II.

Today Mieth is virtually unknown, but in 1941 *Popular Photography* magazine described her as “one of America’s top-notch woman photographers.”¹ At the height of her career from the late-1930s to the mid-1940s, her work straddled two distinct and often contradictory worlds: socially conscious photography and commercial photojournalism. Moreover, her abiding aesthetic and ethical concern with the relationship between herself as photographer and the people she photographed made her a precursor of modern discourse about representation.²

In recent years, photography historians and documentarians have rediscovered Mieth as a pioneering photojournalist. The progressive magazine *Mother Jones* magazine honored her in 1997 with its International Documentary Fund Lifetime Achievement Award. The director of the fund, Chris Johnson, praised Mieth as “a gifted photographer” whose “courage, persistence and commitment to social justice make her an example for concerned photographers everywhere.”³ After her death in 1998, her photographs, negatives, and personal papers were donated to the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, where they comprise one of the Center’s major collections and a rich resource for scholars and researchers.



Hansel Mieth Hagel as photographed by Peter Stackpole, 1936.
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Foundation.

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Cover photo, Hansel Mieth TIME & LIFE Pictures © Time Inc. 1938, Used with Permission.

In the past five years, her work has reached a new generation of viewers through a book, an exhibition, an historical park, and a documentary film. Her photographs of Japanese Americans interned at Heart Mountain Camp (Wyoming, 1943) were published as a book and exhibited at several museums in the western United States in the late 1990s and early 2000s.⁴ Her photograph of a woman welder in the Mare Island Shipyard (California, 1942) is featured in the Rosie the Riveter/WWII Home Front National Historical Park that opened in 2000 in Richmond, California.⁵ Most recently, *Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer*, a feature length documentary on Mieth's life and work was broadcast nationally in 2003 as part of the Public Broadcasting Corporation's series "Independent Lens."⁶

The fact that Mieth's photographs have resurfaced in these commemorative contexts more than half a century after their creation demonstrates the enduring quality and relevance of her photography. Her growing popular recognition has been matched by increased attention from the academic community, with the publication of several chapters and articles about her in the past decade. Art historians have been at the forefront of research into Mieth's life and work, with a resulting emphasis on her role as a documentary photographer. Unlike most of the existing literature on Mieth, this paper analyzes her photography as fundamentally shaped by her role as a photojournalist. As such, this study attempts to understand her work within the context of *Life* magazine and photojournalism history. During her career at *Life*, Mieth produced hundreds of photographs, but this study focuses on three photographic essays that exemplify key aspects of her career at the magazine. Each of these stories has taken on a life of its own, beyond the intentions of the photographer or the editors of *Life*. The stories selected for analysis are a 1939 feature about a rhesus monkey colony in Puerto Rico, a 1940 photographic essay about birth control in South Carolina, and a 1943 series of photographs about the World War II internment of Japanese Americans in Wyoming.

Life sent Mieth to Puerto Rico in 1939 to photograph a rhesus monkey colony set up by Harvard University and other institutions for research into childhood diseases. This assignment produced the image generally acknowledged as Mieth's most famous single photograph: a portrait of a glowering rhesus monkey. This image is worth analyzing as a photographic icon that continues to resonate with viewers. Moreover, the evolution of the monkey photograph is emblematic of the trajectory of Mieth's professional career. The photograph was created as part of a serious and significant science story, but its meaning was dramatically altered and ultimately trivialized by *Life* editors. They removed it from its original context and turned it into a novelty photograph called "The Misogynist." Similarly, Mieth's status as a science feature photographer shifted during and after World War II when her assignments became increasingly trivial and then disappeared altogether. Ultimately, her career at *Life* was a casualty of the Cold War.

In contrast to the monkey story, Mieth's birth control story started out as a fluff piece about the South but ended up being a serious article about a then-controversial subject. This story's significance is enhanced by the fact that Mieth wrote at length about the assignment and her reaction to the published story. An unpublished autobiographical manuscript reveals that Mieth was excited about the story's social significance. Also, she had worked hard to establish a close and trusting relationship with a nurse she had photographed. She was disappointed and disgusted, however, with the text and photographs selected by her editors and with the story's racist tone. Thus, the birth control story provides an excellent example of the photojournalist's lack of creative control at *Life* during the thirties and forties. This story is emblematic of Mieth's struggle to show the truth as she saw it within the confines of the magazine's commercial and conservative agenda.

Unlike the other two features examined in this study, Mieth's Heart Mountain photographs were never published by *Life*, although they were created on assignment for the magazine. This assignment marked the end of Mieth's active career at *Life* (she published only two essays in the magazine from 1943 to 1955). One measure of the importance of the Heart Mountain photographs is their discovery, publication as a book, and exhibition

in several museums during the 1990s and early 2000s. This story illustrates the depth of Mieth's commitment to racial equality. Equally important, it provides a dramatic demonstration of mainstream media's culpability in censoring unpopular viewpoints, especially during wartime. Like Dorothea Lange's photographs of Manzanar, Mieth's photographs of Heart Mountain were unseen until decades after the internment. Lange's photographs, commissioned by the War Relocation Authority, were impounded during the war and for many years afterwards. Mieth's photographs were subjected to a subtler yet equally effective form of censorship: they were simply rejected by the magazine's editors.

In addition to analyzing Mieth's photographs and locating them in their historical context, this study includes Mieth's own words, taken from interviews and unpublished manuscripts in her archive at the Center for Creative Photography. Her private reflections provide a rare glimpse into working conditions for *Life* photographers, including relationships with editors and the degree of creative control exercised by photographers. Mieth's reflections describe her interactions with editors Wilson Hicks and John Shaw Billings, as well as publisher Henry R. Luce. They also reveal the personalities of Mieth's colleagues at *Life*, including Margaret Bourke-White, Robert Capa, and W. Eugene Smith.

These primary sources—interviews, correspondence, and unpublished manuscripts—allow Mieth's unique perspective to enhance our understanding of her photographs. These sources offer a fascinating glimpse into the previously hidden triumphs and frustrations of a pioneering female photojournalist of the twentieth century. They also reveal Mieth's progressive ideas on such issues as race relations, women's rights, and representation. Finally, they provide an insider's account of life as a photojournalist at the immensely popular *Life* magazine.

Historians of art, popular culture, and photography have explored *Life* as a rich resource for understanding twentieth-century American culture and society. The magazine provides a fascinating and diverse visual record of the news, entertainment, and social trends of the five decades (1936-1972) during which it was published as a weekly. Equally important, it also reveals the politics of Henry Luce and his Time-Life media empire and the century's shifting ideologies of race, gender, class, and national identity.⁷

A handful of authors have explored Mieth's career at *Life* and her contributions to photography. Photojournalism professor Ken Light focused on Mieth as a documentary photographer, while former *Life* photographer John Loengard located her within the family of *Life* photographers.⁸ Both authors provided valuable insights into Mieth's art and politics, in her own words. They did not, however, examine the content of her photographs or explore fully her complex relationship with *Life*.

Among the scholars who have analyzed Mieth's relationship with *Life* is art historian Sally Stein. In an interpretative essay in *Original Sources*, published by the Center for Creative Photography, Stein commented on the contradictory relationship between Mieth and *Life*. Referring to Mieth's popular monkey photograph, Stein noted: "The strange success of that photograph is especially ironic since Mieth and [husband Otto] Hagel led lives that demonstrated a fervent commitment to social and political independence rather than commercial and cultural success."⁹

Art historian Terence Pitts offered another perspective on Mieth in *Reframing America*, a book that focused on her experiences as an émigré photographer. He noted that Mieth's outsider status gave her a unique perspective on American life. This perspective, in turn, made her valuable to *Life* editors and provided depth and complexity to her photographs: "Partly because [European émigré photographers] looked at America with fresh eyes and partly because the America they found did not correspond to the America they expected, their work often addressed the issues that haunt this country: poverty, injustice, and intolerance."¹⁰

In addition to these sources, valuable essays about Mieth have been written by fellow socially conscious photographers Susan Ehrens and Grace Schaub, and by filmmaker Nancy Schiesari.¹¹ These authors have taken an openly sympathetic view of Mieth's political and artistic goals, and have tended to view her association with *Life*

as a mixed blessing at best. The magazine gained her widespread exposure, but ultimately acted as a constraining force in her life and work.

The literature on Mieth makes one thing clear: Her working-class background and leftist political convictions meant that her career at *Life* was fraught with frustrations and contradictions. For instance, she deplored the magazine's anti-labor bias and the influence its corporate advertisers exerted on the editorial content. At the same time, she identified with the working class and minority people whom she photographed. Moreover, she supported racial equality at a time when racism was the norm, both at *Life* and in American society. Scholars have not yet fully explored, however, how Mieth responded to these tensions and how they shaped her photojournalism.

The Road to LIFE: Background and Early Career

Hansel (born Johanna) Mieth was born in Germany in 1909, where she grew up in poverty. Although she dreamed of becoming a doctor, financial problems forced her to leave school early, and she never received a formal education. At the age of 15 she left Germany with Otto Hagel, who became her lifelong companion, a fellow photographer, and husband. As teenagers and young adults, Mieth and Hagel lived a vagabond life, forging passports and motorbiking through France, Spain, and Italy. Later, they traveled through Vienna, "where they slept under bridges, earning a few shillings as street musicians. For three months they took refuge in a Yugoslav monastery. Johanna had changed her name to Hansel, to pass for a boy."¹² They arrived in the United States around the time of the stock market crash of 1929.¹³ Mieth's sympathy with the working class was apparent from an argument she had with relatives who sponsored her immigration to America. Her cousin, who had met her boat in Philadelphia, remarked that because of a strike, Mieth would be able to get work. Mieth replied, "You think I'm going to be a strikebreaker!"¹⁴ This led to a fight and, apparently, a break with her relatives.

She and Otto moved to California, where they worked as fruit pickers up and down the Pacific coast. Their lifelong identification with the working class was forged during these years. Their earliest pictures showed life among itinerant farm workers. Her first photographic assignments were for the Works Progress Administration. Her ability to connect with marginalized communities (minorities and radical workers) opened the door to her *Life* career. She helped Peter Stackpole, newly hired as *Life*'s West Coast photographer, to get photos for a Chinatown assignment:

Stackpole came in [to the San Francisco studio where they both developed their prints] with a tale of woe. His Chinatown story was not working out right. The Chamber of Commerce had taken him in tow, and all he could get was very nice pictures of the telephone exchange, the theaters, and all the obvious things. He wanted to show the Chinese in their homes, about their daily tasks, but they didn't want to be photographed. They were polite—very polite, thank you. But no pictures! When he insisted, they smiled and didn't understand.

Hansel agreed to take him to the homes of her Chinese friends. They knew and trusted her, and with her help he got his pictures. She gave him a few of her own Chinatown shots, and he showed them to Dave Hulburd, now head of *Time* magazine. *Time* bought her pictures and wanted to see more. Soon Hulburd was giving Hansel assignments. First there were small stories. Then came a big one on Harry Bridges and the San Francisco waterfront.¹⁵

Mieth and Hagel were among the few photographers who had access to Harry Bridges, a key figure in California's radical labor movement.¹⁶ Her apparent acceptance by minorities and radical labor leaders combined with her "New Deal" photographic aesthetic—with its strong composition, dramatic lighting, and humanistic feel—made her attractive to *Life*. Some staff members, however, were suspicious of her political connections. Stackpole, for instance, recalled that *Life*'s managing editor, John Shaw Billings "asked me a lot of questions

about Hansel Mieth. He said ‘I guess she’s pretty left-wing, isn’t she?’ I said, ‘I suppose so. She photographed the waterfront strike in San Francisco and the downtrodden.’ He said, ‘I don’t care as long as she takes good pictures.’”¹⁷

For her part, Mieth was reluctant to work for what she called a “capitalistic” enterprise and disliked the magazine’s editorial philosophy and its cozy relationship with advertisers. She worried that she did not fit in at *Life*. Her concerns were well founded because from her first encounter with *Life*, Mieth’s photographs were used in ways that defeated their original intent. For example, Stein recounted the publication of an early Mieth photograph in *Life*:

Less than two months after its debut as a popular weekly, *Life*’s January 11, 1937, issue carried on one page seven shots of San Francisco street life at its seediest. Below the headline “BUM” unfolds a short sequence in which a man lies on the sidewalk ignored by passersby, then attracts a small crowd, and finally is moved to the stoop of a flophouse bearing the name “Comfort,” which permits the resumption of pedestrian traffic. . . .

We should not be surprised that *Life* framed the series in 1937 to emphasize the ubiquitous “urban instinct” to avoid getting involved. . . . More surprising is that Mieth appears to have accepted such treatment of her pictures; shortly afterward she moved to New York when *Life* offered her a job on staff.¹⁸

When asked by interviewer John Loengard (himself a former *Life* photographer) how she and Otto ended up working for Henry Luce, Mieth replied “I must have been a little hungry or something, because I said O.K. and joined the staff of *Life*.”¹⁹ Based on Mieth’s private writings, however, it seems that Hagel persuaded her to take the job, arguing that they could use their pictures to bring about change. According to a Hagel manuscript to which Mieth often referred late in life as an articulation of their approach to photography, and specifically their work for *Life*:

We wanted, in some way to contribute to an understanding of the inequities of the world, we wanted somehow to help to bring about a change in the world through our photographs, through our reporting. In this way we drifted, or rather gravitated toward Life Magazine, since we wanted to make a living with our camera, and since LIFE was the new and exciting market.²⁰

Hagel concluded that their success was mixed, at best: “We had become something of an intermediary in the position of the contesting classes, and while we assumed and hoped that we were helping our class, we were doing the work and bidding of the other. Our outlook in our work gave a human appeal to the magazine that helped it to reach a wider audience.”²¹

Mieth’s private writings, interviews, and correspondence reveal that she felt out of place in the New York offices of *Life* and that her relations with the magazine’s editors were somewhat strained. She seemed to have a cordial working relationship with her immediate supervisor, picture editor Wilson Hicks, although she observed that he had “little bit of a personality problem” and “didn’t quite know how to treat people.”²² Despite these comments, Hicks seemed to treat Mieth with respect, as shown in a letter in which he responded to her misgivings and insecurities about her job, reassuring her that she was indeed a vital member of the magazine’s staff:

You may be assured that there is no rein to my willingness and no end to my patience as far as you are concerned so long as you continue to do good work and progress as a photographer. Your note would frighten me if I could find in my conscience any support for the truth of its fears. Sometimes I feel a little hesitant about breaking in on Mr. Billings who also must make the best possible use of his time. But I refuse to let my imagination lead me into the error of the ‘gap’ you mention. If you will come to my office oftener, I feel

confident you will find yourself becoming more and more a part of our organism.²³

Hicks reported to managing editor John Shaw Billings. The letter quoted above suggests that Hicks tried to mediate between Mieth and Billings. Her archive contains no correspondence from Billings, but it does contain an autobiographical manuscript in which she wrote about Hicks, Billings, and even publisher Henry R. Luce, using pseudonyms.²⁴ Billings had a reputation for being formal and distant with all the staff, but especially the photographers. Mieth wrote that she had her first conversation with Billings two and a half years after she started working for the magazine. She described him as “a person remote from the photographers” and “close to God [Luce].”²⁵ She also noted that he was the butt of jokes among the staff:

Privately, the stablefull of photographers of [*Life*], had their laughs about Mr. [Billings]. They called him “Yup-Yup.” For, when Mr. [Luce] deigned to come downstairs to the thirtysecond [sic] floor to look at the layout of a story and make his own suggestions, Mr. [Billings] would punctuate them invariably with his “yup-yup.” The photographers said among themselves that Mr. [Billings] got most of his ideas out of the *Readers Digest*. There was a great rivalry going on between Mr. [Hicks], the picture editor and Mr. [Billings], the idea man. And whenever Mr. [Billings] was away Mr. [Hicks] would occupy his office, sitting in his seat, working at his desk.²⁶

Describing a rare conversation with Billings, Mieth observed the visible signs of her working-class status, as compared to his carefully maintained elegance. She also noted her own discomfort and embarrassment at this observation:

[Billings] had waxed eloquent. He described the pictures in his mind in sweeping movements of his well-manicured, beautiful hands, he bent toward [Hansel] to make her understand better. And [she] was fascinated by the movement of these hands and their expressiveness, and she glanced down upon her own rough hands, the fingernails stained brown from developer, broken and grubby from work. And she hid her hands away from sight behind the handbag in her lap.²⁷

She further described Billings, whom she seemed to regard with a blend of sympathy and pity: “He looked so funny, so pathetic sitting there [in the limousine] so bolt-upright with hands folded over the silver knob of his cane, that silly Homburg on his head.”²⁸ Finally, she recounted a conversation in which Billings complimented her work: “Mr. [Hicks] says that you are one of [*Life*’s] most valuable employees, Miss [Mieth]. We are proud of you.” In this same conversation, she had Billings quoting Luce’s praise for her “pictures with so much feeling” and “deeply felt human warmth and understanding.”²⁹

In her manuscript, Mieth also recalled a meeting with Luce himself at the Waldorf while she had a late lunch with Billings. She described Luce as tall and dignified, and recounted voicing her “idealistic opinions” to him:

“I believe that a magazine like [*Life*] has a need for truth before anything.” She felt uncomfortable under the amused smile of Mr. [Luce]. “I mean the people’s truth. I mean have your heart right there with the people. [He] smiled his bemused smile, and he looked at her kindly. “You are alright, Miss [Mieth],” he said. “I hope you never loose [sic] this belief.”³⁰

She described feeling unsure of who her boss was, Hicks or Billings. And she detected tension between Hicks and Billings over the relationship between editorial and advertising departments: “[Hicks] is shouting that [Billings] is ruining the magazine by letting the Advertizing [sic] take the lead, making a mockery of the editorial department.”³¹ She elaborated, explaining why Billings was taking pains to create a happy story about the South: “[Billings says] the South is bringing in the big money with full and double page ads [for oil, tobacco, rum,

lumber, paper, and turpentine].”³²

Mieth’s correspondence and interviews shed light on her relationships with other photographers. These sources reveal that she had few close friends among her *Life* colleagues. Among the photographers with whom she interacted on a personal level were Robert Capa and W. Eugene Smith. Capa shared her immigrant’s perspective, while Smith shared her socially conscious approach to photojournalism. Publicly, she praised Capa’s ability to photograph the heroic suffering of war.³³ Privately, however, she admitted that despite their friendship, she could not relate to his lifestyle: “he was too much of a cosmopolitan, a man well versed in the drinking department and a connoisseur of expensive foods.”³⁴

Mieth seemed much more comfortable with Smith, whom she admired as a socially conscious photographer. She called him “the best” at creating structure and telling a dramatic story with photographs.³⁵ She also regarded him as a kindred spirit: “we understood each other very well. . . . what we subscribed to was this responsibility in life. We were born, we have a place in life, and we felt we had a responsibility to give back, to help if we possibly could to move the world a little closer to understanding—one person to the other, against wars and the war industry.”³⁶ She acknowledged, however, Smith’s notoriously difficult personality and his chaotic personal life: “He was a wonderful guy, and he was impossible.”³⁷

Another *Life* colleague who made a strong impression on Mieth was Margaret Bourke-White. Bourke-White was the first female staff photographer at *Life*, and Mieth was the second. Although they both had the courage and talent to excel in the male-dominated world of magazine photography, in other ways they could hardly have been more different. Bourke-White was tall, glamorous, and college-educated. Mieth was petite, down-to-earth, and a high school dropout. In the workplace, Mieth lived in the formidable shadow of the famous Bourke-White:

Quite often when I arrived at a job destination, people would ask me, “Are you Miss Bourke-White?” I shook my head “No” and gave my name. They would look puzzled. “But Miss Bourke-White is the photographer for LIFE,” they would say. “Yes,” I’d say, “yes, but I’m not she. LIFE has a few other photographers.” This was always an awkward beginning, and I had to work doubly hard and yet make it appear so easy, to still their anxiety and mine.³⁸

In stark contrast to Mieth’s warm interpersonal style, Bourke-White was aloof. Mieth’s gift for acute observation is apparent in her description of Bourke-White: “When I watched her talk with people, I was fascinated by her quick, radiant smile, but as soon as she turned away the smile would disappear as with the flick of a switch.”³⁹ Mieth responded to her colleague with characteristic empathy:

As photographers, Bourke-White and I were away so often that we had very little time in New York. We did not know each other well. We met infrequently in the office and we had no time together to become buddies. I do not know whether or not the democratic spirit between her and the other photographers was working. Miss Bourke White had brought her own retinue to “LIFE”: Mrs. Graebner, her lab-man, became head of the photo lab at “LIFE”, her devoted secretary, Margaret Smith Seargent [sic], became head of the negative editing department. Consequently, Miss Bourke White had a decided advantage over the rest of us. She had her own, private office, while the rest of us had our desks and lockers in the open bullpen. There was an aloofness between her and the rest of us. I sometimes felt sorry for the beautiful, well-dressed woman, so isolated in her four walls.⁴⁰

Despite the poor ideological fit between Mieth and her *Life* colleagues and editors, her career at the magazine soon took off. She received a wide range of assignments, many of which were prominently featured as the photographic essay of the week, and three of which earned the coveted status of cover story.⁴¹ Mieth’s major

photographic works told compelling stories about dominant values in American society and about vital issues of the day. A few of these stories will be examined here. Close analyses of selected photographs, captions, and their social context will help to illuminate Mieth's contributions to *Life* and to photojournalism in general.

Mieth's published work reveals, to some extent, her social perspective and her approach to photography. This material does not, however, tell the whole story. Because the stories were laid out and captioned by editors, not photographers, they generally do not reveal the circumstances behind the photos or give the photographer's viewpoint. Mieth's interviews, correspondence files, and unpublished autobiographical manuscript offer insights into the following areas: her working conditions at the magazine; the extent to which she exercised creative control over her assignments; her photographic techniques; her interactions with the people in her photos; and her response to the published stories.

Mieth covered a variety of stories—from the serious to the frivolous—but some common themes emerged. A few themes were actively promoted by *Life*: science, children, animals, and women. *Life*, however, downplayed her politics in its promotional material and portrayed her as a benign photographer with no particular political views. Note, for instance, the tone and content of a brief biography of Mieth that ran in 1937 (in the issue with her cover story on spring lambs): “Noted for her photographs of children, she also takes excellent animal pictures. . . .”⁴² Similarly, a 1938 feature stated that “the pictures she most enjoys taking are of young people and babies.”⁴³ Both blurbs carefully ignored the kind of photos that actually got *Life* interested in Mieth: her powerful images of labor strife, migrant farm workers, and minority communities in California.

Despite *Life*'s efforts to construct Mieth as a harmless photographer of animals, children, and women, in retrospect most of her work clearly focused on important social issues of the day, including racial and gender equality. Three assignments illustrate these themes and Mieth's contradictory relationship with *Life*: a monkey colony in Puerto Rico, a birth control clinic in South Carolina, and an internment camp in Wyoming.

“Misogynist Monkey”: The Evolution of an Icon

Mieth's most famous single photograph is a portrait of a rhesus monkey dubbed “Misogynist Monkey” by *Life* editors. This photograph began as part of a scientific series about a monkey colony in Puerto Rico. Mieth had built a reputation as a skilled and sympathetic photographer of animals and children, and was regularly assigned to cover scientific and medical stories.⁴⁴ Although the monkey story started out as a typical *Life* assignment, it would soon be transformed into something more than a science feature. The photograph has literally taken on a life of its own. More accurately, it has taken on several lives: first, as part of a science story, then as a humorous “Picture of the Week,” then as an inside joke among the *Life* staff, and finally as a potent symbol of Mieth's career at *Life*.

“First American Monkey Colony Starts on Puerto Rico Islet” appeared on January 2, 1939. It was a two-page story with six photographs, including a life-size image of a rhesus monkey, three photos of scientists working with monkeys, and two photos of monkeys from India exploring their new environment. The text offered a curious blend of scientific background and moralistic anthropomorphism. For instance, the article explained that the main reason for the establishment of the three-hundred-monkey colony was “to breed thousands of healthy animals of known ancestry at low cost for medical experiments—particularly infantile paralysis.” Shifting to a discussion of the monkey's characteristics, the article commented, “Because he is considered sacred in India, the rhesus is domineering, undisciplined and bad tempered. Sexually promiscuous, he contrasts sharply with the monogamous, well-behaved gibbon. Besides studying their respective family behaviors, Dr. [Clarence Ray] Carpenter and visiting scientists will conduct psychological tests and experiment on causes and cures for tuberculosis, infantile paralysis and leprosy. Progress of this work will be reported by LIFE in a future issue.”⁴⁵

The field of primatology was in its infancy in the late thirties, and C. R. Carpenter was one of its founding fathers, based on his studies of howler monkeys in Panama and gibbons in Thailand.⁴⁶ The establishment of the

rhesus monkey colony in Cayo Santiago off the coast of Puerto Rico further solidified Carpenter's reputation as a pioneering observer of free-ranging monkeys and apes.⁴⁷ The colony was the first long-term research field site for semicaptive primate populations, and it still exists as such today.⁴⁸ According to a researcher who visited the colony in the sixties and seventies, it attracted wide publicity during its early years and received visiting journalists (including Mieth) "until the risk of being attacked by the animals became a deterring factor."⁴⁹



Hansel Mieth / TIME & LIFE Pictures © Time Inc. 1939, Used with Permission.

editors cast the monkey as the victim of female noise and (implicitly) sexual aggression. The essay also cast Mieth as the intrepid photographer "who promptly plunged into the lagoon, camera strapped to her shoulder, swam and waded until she overtook the exhausted misogynist. After taking the photo shown here she helped a native boy drive the monkey back to his island home."⁵¹

Readers responded enthusiastically to the empathy behind the "misogynist," noting that Mieth's photo both captured emotions in the monkey and evoked emotions in the viewer. One reader described "the horrible foreboding of doom" the photo inspired. Another reader simply stated that it "scared the hell out of me." Still another focused on the monkey himself, expanding on the personification theme begun by the magazine: "It is the portrait of a misfit suffering the untold agonies of a tortured mind. Frustration yet determination, terror yet superiority are all there. . . . All the world has turned against him and he is fired with a hatred of everything he knows. And it is a magnificent, futile, unavailing hatred."⁵²

More than a year after it was first published, readers continued to remember and write about the monkey photograph. In two letters to the editor published in August 1940, readers noted a striking resemblance between the "disgruntled monkey" and a "surly German prisoner of war" whose photograph was published by *Life*.⁵³ In the seventies and eighties, the photograph resurfaced in retrospective books, where it was prominently displayed and

Although this first installment seemed to have the makings of an exciting photo essay—scientific significance, exotic locale, photogenic animals, and prestigious institutions such as Harvard and Columbia—the promised continuation of the rhesus monkey story never materialized. Instead, two weeks later (January 16, 1939) the magazine published a portrait of a single monkey as the "Picture of the Week." This full-page photo, with the caption, "A misogynist monkey seeks solitude in the Caribbean off Puerto Rico," became Mieth's best-known picture.⁵⁰ According to the short explanatory essay accompanying the photo, "the chatter of innumerable female monkeys had impelled this neurotic bachelor to seek escape from the din of Santiago." The photo's popularity must have derived, at least in part, from its underlying narrative. The

its sexist narrative was told to a new audience. In 1973, the monkey was featured in *The Best of LIFE* under the heading “Fun Out of Life,” with the caption “An unhappy rhesus monkey... glowers from a sandbar after escaping chattering females.”⁵⁴ In *LIFE: The First 50 Years: 1936-1986*, Mieth’s monkey was featured as a “Classic Photo” from 1939, with the caption “A misogynist monkey fleeing jungle females opted for the sea.”⁵⁵

Thus, the focus turned away from the scientific significance of the rhesus monkey story to a single monkey’s supposed emotional state, the result of being surrounded by too many noisy and aggressive females. Rather than a subject of serious research, the monkey became instead a novelty photo, played by *Life*’s editors for a sexist joke. The joke was based on the circumstances surrounding the photo (supposedly, the monkey had fled the advances of female monkeys, a fate worse than captivity). The notion of a lone monkey fleeing “the chatter of innumerable females” seemed to resonate widely with *Life*’s staff and readers. Former *Life* editor Edward K. Thompson recalled the monkey picture:

One Mieth project caused me to disagree with Billings’s picture judgment. She had shot what we expected to be an essay at a Puerto Rican medical lab which used rhesus monkeys. It was well researched and full of eloquent pictures. Billings riffled through and came upon a lone male standing chest deep in water, looking forlorn but glowering. Apparently he had fled from amorous females. Billings, who usually disdained anthropomorphism, immediately labeled it “The Misogynist” and laid it out for “Picture of the Week,” setting the rest of the photos aside. I protested feebly about all those other excellent pictures going to waste, and he brushed me off with, “Oh, those can run anytime.” They never did, but Billings was right. The monkey was a classic and showed up on the walls of male hangouts like filling stations, machine shops, and bars all over America.⁵⁶

In addition to the misogynist joke, there was an inside joke among *Life* staffers that the monkey bore an uncanny resemblance to the magazine’s publisher Henry R. Luce. According to Susan Ehrens, a photo historian who interviewed Mieth, the evolution of the rhesus monkey story was bitterly ironic for Mieth. It resulted in her most famous photo, but utterly sacrificed the assignment’s scientific significance:

When she returned to New York with her extensive study of the primates, she was horrified by the misuse of the photographs by her editors at *Life*. It seemed that Alex King, one of the writers on the staff, decided that when angry, the publisher Henry Luce resembled the monkey in Hansel’s most famous photograph. . . . It also appeared in U.S. Camera, titled ‘Mad Monkey.’ It has since been reprinted by *Life* numerous times, most recently in the 50-year anniversary issue and Hansel notes, “It’s one of their prized possessions.”⁵⁷

According to Ehrens, the monkey came to symbolize Mieth’s own growing frustration with the pace and quality of her life. She quoted Mieth as saying, “The longer I lived in New York City, the more I felt like the monkey must have felt.”⁵⁸ When she gave a print of the monkey photo to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Mieth enclosed a letter which stated, “To accentuate the importance of the picture, *LIFE* magazine killed the scientific aspect of the Essay, to my sorrow.”⁵⁹ Elsewhere, Mieth joked, “I don’t know why this photograph is so popular. It’s been like a monkey on my back.”⁶⁰

The evolution of the “misogynist monkey” photograph—and its strong resonance with editors, readers, and with the photographer herself—raises several issues that are rooted in the photograph but extend beyond it into larger cultural arenas, including the cultural history of primatology and the immense popularity of apes and monkeys not only as scientific subjects but also as icons of popular culture (a trend that accelerated after World War II). These issues include empathy and anthropomorphism in primate research and in primate photography and the significance of the “misogynist” moniker.

The questions of empathy and anthropomorphism loom large in primatology, particularly in recent studies by feminist scholars who have noted that some degree of anthropomorphism (attributing human qualities such as emotion, intelligence, and personality to animals) is fundamental to studying and understanding primates.⁶¹ Because of their similarity to humans, monkeys and apes are particularly apt candidates for anthropomorphism. This is especially true for certain species with expressive faces and distinctive personalities, such as chimpanzees and rhesus monkeys.

Given the strong pull of empathy and anthropomorphism within Mieth's photograph of the rhesus monkey, the question becomes: what was the basis of the empathy evoked by this image? It seemed to differ, according to who was doing the looking. For instance, Billings, the other editors, and apparently many male viewers seemed to read the "misogynist monkey" as a mirror for their own misogyny. This conclusion is supported by the textual background of the photo, whereby the monkey is set upon by "innumerable chattering females" who are also sexually aggressive. Such a reading could be analyzed as a male response to changing sex roles in American society.

Mieth's empathy with the monkey was qualitatively different from that of the editors and male viewers, perhaps because her life resembled that of the monkey in some respects. Like him, she was outnumbered by members of the opposite sex, transplanted into a foreign land, and marginalized (in part because her politics were so different from those of her editors). When she said, "The longer I lived in New York City, the more I felt like the monkey must have felt," she seemed to refer to a sense of frustration and unhappiness at the competitive world of magazine photojournalism. Describing that period of her life, she said, "I became combative and saw myself becoming a career bitch, and I didn't want that. I wanted to be a feeling human being."⁶²

For a female photographer, it was probably difficult not to become combative, given the misogyny that reigned in photojournalism and at *Life* magazine during the thirties and forties. For instance, Mieth dreaded assignments for the "Life Goes to a Party" department and for silly and sexist "glamour" features.⁶³ She recalled with humor an incident that must have been humiliating at the time: "At a stag party in the Waldorf I was sent to photograph, one old geezer stuck out his foot in the dark to trip me. And when I fell in the aisle he started pawing me. I let him have it over his bald head with my heavy four by five camera and he collapsed."⁶⁴

Turning to a seemingly more benign manifestation of *Life's* misogyny, Mieth noted the glamour girls who were a vital part of the *Life* success formula, at times stealing Hagel's attention:

And she knew that the plainness of her being would never compete with the sexy allure of the army of long-legged gals who clung like carrion flies about the media. Daily the corridors and offices of [*Life*] were redolent with the sexy glamour and intrigue of young things eager to catch the eye of photographer or executive. Cunningly, hungrily, they baited the trap. Hoping for fame and fortune. There were just enough of them who made it, for a while, to whet the appetites of others. To make the pages of [*Life*], or maybe even the cover, was a passport for a glowing future worth any effort.⁶⁵

With the 2003 broadcast of the documentary *Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer* on PBS, the monkey photograph has reached a new generation of viewers. It continues to resonate, and its meaning has shifted yet again. Several viewers who posted comments on the PBS website commented on the monkey and wanted to know where they could buy a copy. One viewer wrote: "I wept with the story of how Hansel took that photo and how she was haunted throughout her life by that encounter with that animal and the image she captured. It was a revelation to hear that that moment had stuck with her throughout her life and that she had had a dialogue in a dream later in her life with that lonely, pensive, angry animal." Another wrote: "Please send me a picture of the 'Monkey' because his expression brought out tears from my eyes which doesn't happen easily to me. I also see

the profundity of truth in the eyes of that (human) animal. It is like looking truth in the face for me.”⁶⁶

The evolution of the narrative behind Mieth’s monkey photo—and the image’s immense and enduring popularity—illustrates the power of Mieth’s primate photography as a mirror for projecting all sorts of ideologies and emotions, including misogynistic ones. The photo’s transformation from a scientific document to a novelty shot can also be seen as a metaphor for Mieth’s own marginalization as a serious photographer. Mieth’s sensitivity and empathy shaped her *Life* stories, but as the following assignment illustrates, her voice was sometimes muted or drastically altered by the editors’ selection and captioning of her photographs.

“A Story Cold and Factual”: Birth Control in South Carolina

Mieth’s birth control story is a significant but overlooked part of her work. This assignment brought together two of Mieth’s photographic interests: medicine and social issues, in particular women’s reproductive rights and racial equality. Although the magazine touted her as a photographer of science stories, especially those involving animals and children, this essay shows that she had the ability to photograph important social issues.⁶⁷ *Life* took pride in covering ground-breaking and controversial medical issues, although this sometimes got the editors into trouble with readers and advertisers.⁶⁸ The birth control story is especially significant because it addressed two potentially explosive topics rarely found together in the media in 1940: contraception and racism.

Mieth’s autobiographical manuscript devoted several pages to the birth control essay and the South Carolina assignment out of which it grew. Managing editor John Shaw Billings sent Mieth to South Carolina to photograph “a story about the quality of the South, it’s [*sic*] nostalgia, its dreaminess, its haunting beauty.”⁶⁹ Mieth was skeptical about this assignment, believing it was intended to placate advertisers. She recalled being greeted at her hotel by men from the chamber of commerce and the tourist bureau: “Both men talked at once pouring out words in streams about the beauty and the uniqueness of the South. They wanted to whisk [Hansel] away with them to show her, to immerse her, to give her all the opportunity to get the right kind of pictures.”⁷⁰ She described her strong reaction to these men and the way her assignment was shaping up:

“Damn it—damn it,” she uttered in deep disgust, “Damn you sons of bitches, I hope you croak.” Every assignment had turned out the same: either she was rejected and had to use all her wits not to be turned away as one of the stooges of the establishment, or she was lassoed [*sic*] and saddled with these hungry, man-eating sharks. “Damn [*Life*], they had no business siccing those hyenas on me,” [Hansel] sighed. She wondered how other photographers handled the situation, how they could in spite of all come home with a good story. She heard [Otto] say: “Use them, render them harmless, make them work for you.” How the hell did he do it?⁷¹

Fortunately, from Mieth’s point of view, Picture Editor Wilson Hicks intervened and changed her assignment. The incident provides a vivid demonstration of the rivalry between Hicks and Billings that Mieth described in her personal writings. Soon after her arrival in Charleston, South Carolina, Mieth received a telegram from Hicks. The message was: “Postpone Antelbellum South for news lead on Family Planning. Contact Birth Control Clinic, Columbia, S.C. Researcher on way to meet you there. Best regards [W. Hicks].”⁷² The researcher explained the change in assignment: “[Hicks] is mad as hell. Accuses [Billings] of trying to sabotage him. Of stealing his photographers and siccing them on junk stories for the Advertizing [*sic*] department.”⁷³ As a result of Hicks’s intervention, however, Mieth was no longer covering the “junk” story (a picturesque southern travelogue). Instead, she was sent to cover birth control clinics in South Carolina, a subject that appealed to her interest in social change and race relations.

Mieth’s recollections of this assignment and her response to the published story are among the most vivid entries in her autobiographical manuscript. They shed light on her relationships with editors, her approach to

photography, and the emotional connection she sometimes established with the people she photographed. As such, these recollections are worth quoting at some length. First, she introduced the people she met and photographed in South Carolina, especially Pat Clark, an African-American nurse with whom she apparently shared a strong connection. Then, she described her photographic techniques and how she envisioned the story. Finally, she gave a brief description of the published story and her response to it.

Mieth's manuscript described her emotionally charged experiences on assignment in South Carolina. She forged a friendship with Pat, the nurse whom she considered the key character in the birth control story. Mieth described an exchange that occurred after a conversation about work and their shared connection to the Luce family. They had just realized that they both had a connection to the Luce family, who owned *Life* magazine and a plantation in South Carolina near Hell Hole Swamp, where Pat worked.

[Hansel] looked at her openly now in deep wonder. And then she laughed. She felt so good. She laughed and she laughed. And she felt liberated.

The nurse pulled over to the bank. She brought the car to a stop. Hands on the steering wheel she surveyed [Hansel] with solemn face. Then, like the sun bursting forth from behind a cloud she too began to laugh. They both laughed and the tears streamed down their cheeks. And they laughed and looked deeply into one another's eyes. And there was a liberation and a longing within both of them. And their arms reached out and they found one another. They embraced and they laughed and they layed [*sic*] their cheeks together and said happily: "I feel like you are my sister." "Yes, me too. We both have found a sister."⁷⁴

She also described her approach to taking pictures at the clinic, her vision of the photo essay, and her admiration and respect for the nurse and doctor:

[Hansel] saw and experienced the action not as a whole but in dramatic sections, and she focused her camera on that part of [the] action that compelled her feelings to be part of it. In the back of her mind she held the thread of the story, which was: control over venereal disease, baby spacing, health of mother and child. . . .

Till two in the afternoon they [the doctor and nurse] worked without interruption. [Hansel] was in a daze, never had she seen so much sick humanity, so much helping with so few words. She was joyful in spite of the gravity of the situation. She looked upon the old grizzled doctor, upon this young nurse with feelings akin to veneration. They were doing this week after week. Year after year, she thought, and they preserve their hope and optimism about humanity. I wish I was half as understanding, she thought.⁷⁵

Mieth spent three days with Pat, accompanying her on all her visits. They talked about work, children, and developed a strong personal connection. When Mieth send the film to *Life*, she included caption material and a note to the editors: "Please use story in dignified way. Pat Clark, the nurse, is a wonderful devoted human being. She understands and loves her people and they trust and believe in her."⁷⁶ The story that appeared in *Life*, however, was quite different from the one envisioned by Mieth.

In order to appreciate the birth control photo essay and Mieth's response to it, it is necessary to understand the social context in which the story appeared. Until the 1930s the dissemination of birth control devices and information was prohibited under federal obscenity laws. During the late thirties and early forties, however, laws and public opinion about birth control changed dramatically.⁷⁷ Increasingly, birth control was seen not as a moral issue, but as a scientific one. Attitudes about birth control were strongly influenced by the eugenics movement, which was at its height in the United States from 1905 to 1930. Eugenics had two main thrusts: negative eugenics,

or limiting the reproduction of the “unfit” (feeble-minded, criminals, insane, epileptics, paupers, and certain racial minorities); and positive eugenics, or encouraging the reproduction of the “fit” classes (usually understood as the white, wealthy classes who were believed to possess superior genes). Eugenicists also directed their efforts toward blacks and immigrants, who were widely seen as “unfit.”⁷⁸ The underlying racism of eugenics led not only to the state-sponsored dissemination of contraception through public health clinics, but also to the permanent, often involuntary sterilization of thousands of women (including African-American women) in the clinics.⁷⁹ The extent to which forced sterilization was abused did not become widely known for several decades.⁸⁰ In 1940, birth control was just beginning to be promoted as a tool for public health, with North Carolina and South Carolina at the forefront of what became a national trend.⁸¹

Mieth’s story was featured in May 1940 as the “Medicine” essay, with the title, “Birth Control: South Carolina Uses It for Public Health.” It contained twelve photos by Mieth. The first one showed a 25-year-old white mother with her seven children and the second showed a white woman getting birth control information from a nurse. Nine of the ten remaining photos showed black patients being treated by a white doctor. One photo showed a black woman getting a pre-natal exam from a white doctor and two nurses (one black, one white). The most striking photo in the essay showed a white doctor examining a nine-month-old syphilitic baby.

According to Mieth’s recollections,



Hansel Mieth / TIME & LIFE Pictures © Time Inc. 1940, Used with Permission.

The little boy lay on the table, enormous eyes staring wide and round, lips open, silent. Scrawny neck over jutting clavicles, over the knots of shoulder joints. Arms thin, pitifully thin and rubbery. . . . Ribcage outlined sharply under fleshless splotchy skin. Little belly bloated. Legs mere bone and parchment skin.⁸²

The text and photos contained several references to eugenics, including descriptions of mothers as “unfit” and “ill-equipped,” euphemisms for poor and/or black. The text also offered this familiar argument for providing birth control to the poor and minorities: “The people least equipped to provide for them have the biggest families.”⁸³ It took a direct approach to the race issue: “Bulk of South Carolina’s health problems are among Negroes, who comprise 45% of the State’s population. For most Negro mothers, the midwife in attendance at the birth of a child provided their single annual contact with even the outer edges of the medical profession.”⁸⁴ Further suggestive of the racial discrimination underlying the birth control program, the article pointed out that “Negro mothers and their infants” were vastly overrepresented in South Carolina’s country clinics, with a “16-to-1 majority.”⁸⁵

Not only were blacks shown in the article as populous, prolific, and poor, they were also portrayed as syphilitic. Syphilis was a major health menace throughout the United States until 1943 when doctors began successfully treating it with antibiotics. Thus, the fact that the article mentioned syphilis is not remarkable. What is noteworthy, however, is the racist tone of its syphilis discussion. The disease was portrayed in the article as a frightful menace that could be controlled through the selective use of birth control. The dramatic photograph of a syphilitic baby who “has not long to live” was accompanied by the alarming figure that “South Carolina’s doctors have found 23% of the mothers suffering from syphilis.” Most striking is the fact that all three of the syphilis victims shown in the article, mothers and infants, were black. Of the two white mothers pictured in the story, one was portrayed as poor but healthy (at least, not syphilitic) and the other was described as suffering from tuberculosis. *Life*’s racist treatment of syphilis was no aberration; in fact it reflected the widely held notion that blacks were more prone to the disease because of their promiscuity and lack of personal hygiene.⁸⁶ A tragic consequence of this racism was Alabama’s Tuskegee study of syphilis, in which doctors left hundreds of infected black men untreated for the sake of a state-sponsored public health department study of the disease.⁸⁷

Mieth was most likely unaware of the extent of the racism that motivated South Carolina’s birth control clinics. However, she was acutely aware of the racist tone of the essay, as indicated by her fierce response to the way her photos were selected, edited, and captioned by *Life*’s editors:

It was in the middle of the magazine and all of four and a half pages were devoted to it. “Birth Control” was the headline, and in pictures it showed how advanced the State of South Carolina was, for it was using birth control to raise the standard of health. It showed it all in [Hansel’s] own pictures, used out of context, arranged to suit the cold facts of the story of the department of health. Nowhere did it give the name of Pat Clark, the nurse who devoted her life. Nowhere was the old doctor given credit. It was a story cold and factual, mostly told in words, and words as hard as nails and cold as winter. There was the picture of the syphilitic baby. There was the picture of Pat delivering the baby, but it showed her back and it could have been any nurse. All the pictures with feeling had been carefully culled out and only the ones kept in that showed in statistical order the job the State of South Carolina was doing. *How it had found a way to control its runaway Negro population through control of disease* [italics added].⁸⁸

In short, Mieth objected to the story’s underlying racist message and its focus on South Carolina’s Board of Health rather than on Pat Clark and the doctor. She also deplored the editorial omission of “pictures with feeling,” presumably pictures of Pat and the doctor at work.⁸⁹

She also wrote of feeling like a traitor to Pat:

“I can’t go on like this any more, [Otto]. They are cutting the heart out of everything I do. I am sick of it. I am sick of the whole damned job. . . . They can shove their rotten magazine. I’ll gladly send them a jar of vaseline. All they print is carrion, bones and dead things. Glamour shit of fashions and European royalty, astrology and stuff to divert people from the real issues of life. . . . I’m just so burned up and hurt. Those people in hell-hole swamp [S.C.] are real people, [Otto]. I had promised that I would stand up for them. And now this. Now I’m nothing but white shit to them.”⁹⁰

Mieth clearly felt guilty about the racist message her photos were used to communicate. Because of her personal relationships with black people, she was also hurt by their reactions to the story. She recollected a conversation she had with her friend Paul, a black doctor in New York. She told him, “Even if I was terribly disappointed and hurt by [the birth control story], it did say something.” Paul responded, “It sure did. It said: ‘Nigger you stupid. Nigger you breeding like rabbits. Nigger you filthy.’”⁹¹ In a conversation with editor Hicks she described the story in more restrained language: “Too cold. Too fragmentary. The soul was taken out of it.”⁹²

Mieth’s reflections on the birth control story reveal the depth of her emotional involvement with her subjects and her strong disagreement with *Life*’s editorial decisions regarding picture selection, captioning, and overall framing of the story. Moreover, they indicate that she was ahead of her time with her humanistic and individualistic approach to photojournalism. Such an approach, however, became widely accepted and immensely popular a decade later, with the rise of such photographers as W. Eugene Smith. His venerated 1951 “Nurse Midwife” essay provided a warm and personal portrait of Maude Callen, the kind of portrait that Mieth envisioned for Pat Clark.⁹³ It is also worth noting that Smith’s story was shot in the same location as Mieth’s, and that the two photographers shared a similar outlook on racism. According to Smith,

There were three things about the midwife story that were important: its medical significance; the fact that it was a story of a great human being; and third, I was fighting racism without ever making racism the point. I had long crusaded against racism, not by hitting people over the head with a hammer, but by compassionate understanding, presenting something that people could learn from, so they could make up their own minds.⁹⁴

Mieth’s deep disgust at the racist spin the *Life* editors put on the story reveals that she was ahead of her time in terms of her sensitivity to racism and her support for racial equality. Like Pat Clark, the black nurse whom she saw as the heroine of this photo essay, Mieth tried to mediate two disparate worlds—the marginalized people she photographed and the privileged men who ran the editorial offices of *Life* magazine. Unfortunately, the world of Pat Clark and Hell Hole Swamp remained solidly in the margins. The published photographic essay and Mieth’s reaction to it reveal the difficulty of her struggle to tell the truth about racism in a commercial, conservative publication.

Despite her continued frustrations with *Life*, Hansel Mieth in the early 1940s seemed on the brink of professional success. But America’s entry into World War II and the climate of fear and intolerance that followed, combined with Mieth’s personal desire to leave New York and take up farming in California, led to the slow decline of her photographic career. Her plan was to continue working for *Life*, preferably on photo essays.⁹⁵ But her assignments dwindled during the war, and her postwar career focused more on farming than photography.⁹⁶ Mieth told interviewers that she and Hagel were frozen out of their photography careers because they were blacklisted for refusing to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee.⁹⁷ Most authors have accepted this explanation for the postwar demise of Mieth’s promising career.⁹⁸ Some observers, however, have described her treatment as marginalization, not blacklisting (a term that implies she was fired or placed on a list of photographers who should be denied employment).⁹⁹ It is difficult to document either blacklisting or

marginalization.¹⁰⁰ Whatever the reason, *Life* rejected many of Mieth's wartime and postwar photo essays, most notably a story about Heart Mountain, an internment camp for Japanese-Americans.

“Too Human” for Life: Heart Mountain

Ironically, what has become the best-known photo essay by Mieth (and her husband Otto Hagel) was never published by *Life*.¹⁰¹ Although the Heart Mountain photographs began as a *Life* assignment in 1942, the magazine chose not to publish them. They might never have seen the light of day had they not been discovered in the nineties by former internee Mamoru Inouye, who published them as a book.¹⁰² The photographs were also presented as an exhibition at museums in California, Oregon, and Wyoming. The Heart Mountain photographs tell the story of Japanese-Americans interned at a remote camp in Wyoming during World War II. The Mieth-Hagel archive at the Center for Creative Photography contains fifty photographs of Heart Mountain; Inouye selected 30 of these for his book. The photographs include images of young families, old people, a group of internees saluting a flag, and a portrait of Lieutenant General John Lesesne DeWitt, chief of the Western Defense Command, who supervised the internment. The common theme seems to be desolation, bleakness, and bitter cold. As at Manzanar, mountains loomed in the distance of the camp. The photographs by Mieth and Hagel, however, did not convey a sense of scenic beauty.

In addition to telling the story of a little-known internment camp, the Heart Mountain photographs also conveys the depth of Mieth and Hagel's empathy with marginalized people and their continuing commitment to racial equality and human rights. As Mieth told artist and author Grace Schaub, “I think *Life* did not use the Heart Mountain story during the war because of the horrendous war propaganda being directed against the Japanese.”¹⁰³

Anti-Japanese propaganda was indeed widespread and blatant during and after the war. Moreover, Japanese-Americans were subjected to negative stereotyping, fear, and suspicion, although many had been born in the United States and identified themselves as patriotic Americans. In magazine articles from 1942, two main justifications were given for the internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans (60 percent of whom were American citizens): military necessity and the Japanese assimilation problem. The Japanese-American population was concentrated along the west coast, including the areas designated as “strategic military areas” after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Several articles asserted that the evacuation order was an unquestioned military necessity. Military officials feared that disloyal Japanese Americans who leased large tracts of land areas Los Angeles could turn them “into a landing field for [Japanese] bombers in an hour or two.”¹⁰⁴

The Japanese assimilation problem was also invoked as a justification for internment. According to this argument, the Japanese were different from other immigrants because they tended not to marry white Americans, and they maintained their native customs. Thus, they were suspected of remaining loyal to Japan. *The Saturday Evening Post* quoted a government sociologist who said, “The Japanese were never Americans in California.” He also made the amazing assertion that perhaps the internment experience would help them to assimilate: “This may be their great chance to become Americans.”¹⁰⁵ Liberal observers in *The Nation* made similarly racist comments, including, “Federal and local officials feel incapable of distinguishing between loyal and disloyal persons of Japanese descent.”¹⁰⁶ Criticism of the internment was muted and mainly limited to specialized and/or liberal publications.¹⁰⁷ Throughout the war and for years afterward, Americans seemed blind to the racism behind the internment.¹⁰⁸ Unfortunately, the internment reinforced negative stereotypes about Japanese Americans (including the notion that they were loyal to Japan and incapable of assimilation) and provoked acts of racism after the internees were freed.¹⁰⁹

When the Heart Mountain photos were finally published in the nineties, attitudes toward the internment were much different, and the book was well received. Schaub wrote the introduction to *The Heart Mountain Story*, a



Hansel Mieth, 1942. Collection Center for Creative Photography © 1998 The University of Arizona Foundation.

book of Mieth and Hagel's photographs published by Inouye. She described the Heart Mountain photographs as emblematic of concerned photography:

While there are photographers who distance themselves from their subjects, thinking that this is part of the credo of the "photojournalist," the photographs of the Heart Mountain Relocation

Center were made by two people who, in their own experience, understood just what was at stake. Photographs of compassion such as these are the result of the photographers bring much more than just camera and film to the assignment; they come from bringing the hand to where the heart is, and communicating a kinship with their subjects. This is what separates them from clinical documentation or distant reportage.¹¹⁰

The Japanese-American internment camp photos were described by one critic as “exceptional and among the most powerful I can recall chronicling the Japanese internment. Hansel has captured moments of fear on the faces of Japanese-American children or of people being interviewed by the FBI.” This observer also noted the special position of the “concerned photographers’ who illustrate news and magazine stories, most of them driven by a passion to record the events of their particular era as they experience them and, inescapably, to conform to the wishes and political bent of an editor, to meet deadlines and to earn a living.”¹¹¹

According to filmmaker Nancy Schiesari, “Hansel’s images spoke eloquently about the human spirit in dimensions that eluded LIFE’s editors. At a time when the media was depicting the Japanese as the monstrous Enemy, Hansel’s portrayals were perhaps too human for the magazine. For whatever reason, LIFE never carried the story nor the photographs.”¹¹²

Unfortunately, the Mieth archive yielded no clues as to why *Life* rejected the Heart Mountain photos.¹¹³ However, it might be useful to consider the two Japanese internment photo essays that *Life* did choose to publish. The first—“Coast Japs Are Interned in Mountain Camp”—appeared in 1942 and featured photographs of Manzanar by Ansel Adams.¹¹⁴ The second—“Tule Lake: At This Segregation Center Are 18,000 Japanese Considered Disloyal to the U.S.”—was published in 1944 and contained photographs by Carl Mydans.¹¹⁵ As the titles suggest, these stories presented the internment as a necessary though unfortunate response to a threat. The media in general “remained largely silent in 1942 on the issue of the relocation and internment of Japanese-Americans.”¹¹⁶ As journalism historian Karin Becker Ohrn observed, “the picture magazines steered clear of the Japanese-American internment” as much as possible, and when they did cover it, they took pains not to “plead a cause.”¹¹⁷

In keeping with the “selective omission and optimistic embellishment” that characterized media coverage of the internment,¹¹⁸ Adams’s pictures of Manzanar emphasized the scenic beauty of the place more than the emotions of the internees.¹¹⁹ Mieth’s images of Heart Mountain probably had more in common with Dorothea Lange’s photos of Manzanar (made for the War Relocation Authority) than they did with the internment camp photos of Adams or Mydans. Like Mieth, Lange was openly opposed to the internment and focused her camera on families and groups of people.¹²⁰

Mieth’s photographs of Heart Mountain were unique among visual documents of the Japanese-American internment for a number of reasons. First, Heart Mountain was one of the least visible of all the camps, rarely appearing in the media. Manzanar and Tule Lake were the most widely covered. Second, she had a personal connection with one of the families interned at Heart Mountain, the Akiyas, whom she had known in San Francisco. Jimmie Akiya, who was eighteen at the time of Mieth’s visit to Heart Mountain, recalled, “I remember being really surprised to see Hansel there at the time, because we’ve known [her] since the 1930s.”¹²¹ Again, as in the birth control story, Mieth’s personal relationships with a marginalized minority helped to shape her point of view. Thus, she had an acute awareness of the racism that many Americans chose to ignore. She empathized with people who found themselves doubly marginalized during wartime—Mieth, too, was under suspicion because of her nationality.¹²²

One final lens through which to view the Heart Mountain photos is anti-Japanese discrimination at *Life*, both in the pages of the magazine and in the editorial offices. One of the most blatant examples of racism in *Life* was a feature that ran shortly after Pearl Harbor—“How to tell Japs from the Chinese”—purportedly to protect the



Hansel Mieth, 1942. Collection Center for Creative Photography © 1998 The University of Arizona Foundation.

innocent (Chinese) victims of righteous American anger against the Japanese enemy. The article featured visual comparisons of Chinese and Japanese facial features, skin tones, and even facial expressions (“Chinese wear rational calm of tolerant realists. Japs, like General Tojo, show humorless intensity of ruthless mystics.”).¹²³

Anti-Japanese racist ideology also prevailed in the editorial offices of *Life*. Managing editor Billings was a self-proclaimed xenophobe who hated Indians, Jews, Negroes, and other minorities.¹²⁴ He was not alone in his prejudices, judging by the following incident that Mieth described in an interview with John Loengard: “[Picture editor Wilson Hicks] did some terrible stuff. When war was declared, he said his assistant, Peggy Matsui, could not work any longer in the picture department because she was half Japanese. Hicks knew she was absolutely loyal, to the point where she would have given her life for everybody there. That he could fire her a few days after the war started, was awful.”¹²⁵ Worse still, Matsui died several months later.

Mieth’s Heart Mountain photographs illustrate the depth of her commitment to racial equality. They also demonstrate the power of the mainstream media to render certain perspectives invisible. Fortunately, the Heart Mountain photographs emerged from obscurity during Mieth’s lifetime. It is a testimony to the photographer’s vision and persistence that these photographs were rediscovered, published, and exhibited more than fifty years after their creation. During World War II (and for decades afterwards), Mieth’s images flew in the face of widespread anti-Japanese propaganda, because they showed the injustice of internment. By the 1990s, however, the photographs reflected widespread public denunciation of the internment of Japanese Americans.

Mieth's contributions to photojournalism

As seen in her commentary on the birth control essay, Mieth worked to establish an emotional connection with her subjects, an approach that ran counter to prevailing photojournalistic practices. Such a humanistic, individualistic approach, however, became the norm in the fifties and beyond. This approach, a melding of style and substance, thought and feeling, is most frequently associated with such photographers as W. Eugene Smith, but Mieth was truly a pioneer in bringing this sensibility to photojournalism.

Quoted in a 1941 article in *Popular Photography*, Mieth offered the following advice to aspiring photographers:

Most important of all, the photographer must know how to handle people. The best way I have found is to approach my subject as if I were a respected friend. One cannot approach a subject as an outsider and win confidence or make him feel at ease. If I am called upon to photograph a Mexican family, I try to come to them as if I were a Mexican who understood their problems and wanted to help them.¹²⁶



As filmmaker Nancy Shiesari observed, “Hansel affected her subject to trust her by her receptivity and sense of presence as an empathetic witness to their reality. . . . Her perspective came from observing people and their relationships to each other.”¹²⁷

For Mieth and her husband Otto Hagel this emotional connection was tied to the larger purpose of using photography to bring about social change. Hagel, the more overtly political of the two, summed up their struggle in a manuscript that Mieth often turned to in her later years as an articulation of their life and work. “We thought that our pictures were a subtle means of bringing about a change in human affairs, and we were doing this through the rich man’s publication. We were using their weapons and turning them against them. So we felt, so we thought, so we sincerely believed.”¹²⁸

In practice, this goal proved a source of great frustration and sometimes anger and guilt, as shown by Mieth’s experiences with the birth control and Heart Mountain

assignments. Her reflections, however, revealed a pragmatic side, as in this commentary on her relationship with *Life*:

When [the editors] said they wanted people like me, fine and good. They need people like me to sell their magazine. But at the same time they didn't want to go too far; after all, Mr. Luce was a Republican. We were very, very circumscribed. Not that they told you so, they just didn't print it. So whenever you let yourself go to tell the truth, they would only use that part which fit in with their magazine. And then they needed so much advertising and if the advertising conflicted with a story, then naturally you were out.¹²⁹

When asked if she thought her photographs changed anything, Mieth replied: “Maybe it takes longer than our lifetimes to see the real results of our work.”¹³⁰ As this brief glimpse into her stories about rhesus monkeys, birth control, and the internment of Japanese Americans suggests, much of what Mieth had to say did not “fit in with their magazine.” Nonetheless, her struggle to tell the truth as she saw it her profoundly shaped her work and helped to push *Life*—and photojournalism—into new directions.

Endnotes

I would like to thank the following people who generously helped in the research and writing of this paper: the staff of the Center for Creative Photography; Sally Stein; Ken Light; and John Loengard. I would also like to thank the College of Arts and Letters at James Madison University for a summer research grant that allowed me to visit the Hansel Mieth/Otto Hagel Archive at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson.

¹ Robert W. Brown, “Hansel Mieth Gets Them to Pose,” *Popular Photography*, April 1941, 22.

² See interview with filmmaker and University of Texas film professor Nancy Schiesari, creator of the documentary, *Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer*, prod. and dir. Nancy Schiesari, 53 min., 2003, videocassette and DVD. <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hanselmieth/film.html>

³ Chris Johnson, quoted in Ken Conner, “Hansel Mieth—Admired Photojournalist” (obituary), *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 17, 1998, B8. Johnson was the director of the Mother Jones International Documentary Fund, which named Mieth the 1997 recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award.

⁴ See *The Heart Mountain Story: Photographs by Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel of the World War II Internment of Japanese Americans* (Los Gatos, CA: Mamoru Inouye, 1997). The photographs were exhibited at Santa Clara University (1997), Sonoma State University (1998), the Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles (1999), the Wyoming State Museum (1999-2000), and the Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center, Portland (2000). For reviews of the exhibition, see Kimberly Chun, “The Heart Mountain Story: Prisoners of War in Their Own Land,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, September 26, 1997, 1; Tracey Kaplan, “U.S. Internment Camp Photos on Display; Life Never Printed Pictures,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), October 5, 1997, A28; Patricia Holt, “Pictures of Dignity at an Internee Camp: Japanese Americans Still Saluted Flag,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, February 17, 1998, E4; Ted Mahar, “Photos Illuminate Internment of Japanese Americans,” *The Oregonian*, February 18, 2000, 55.

⁵ See Donna Graves, “Constructing Memory: Rosie the Riveter Memorial: Richmond, California,” *Places* 15: 1 (Fall 2002), 14-17; Dru Sefton, “Riveting Reality: Female World War II Factory Workers Produced Complex History,” *The Houston Chronicle*, February 29, 2004, 7; Ruth Rosen, “Rosie the Riveter Lives,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, March 29, 2004, B7.

⁶ *Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer*. Prod. and dir. Nancy Schiesari, 53 min., 2003, videocassette and DVD. <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hanselmieth/film.html>

⁷ Cultural historians have analyzed *Life's* influential articulations of national identity, the American Dream, and modernity. See Wendy Kozol, *LIFE's America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). For critical essays on the range of topics covered by *Life*, from gender to race to the atomic bomb, see Erika Doss, ed. *Looking at Life Magazine* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001). For an analysis of the larger journalistic context in which *Life* emerged, with a focus on the magazine's publisher, see James L. Baughman, *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987).

⁸ Ken Light, *Witness in Our Time: Working Lives of Documentary Photographers* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); John Loengard, *LIFE Photographers: What They Saw* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1998).

⁹ Sally Stein, "Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel," in Amy Rule and Nancy Solomon, eds., *Original Sources: Art and Archives at the Center for Creative Photography* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, 2002), 127.

¹⁰ Andre Codrescu and Terence Pitts, *Reframing America: Alexander Alland, Otto Hagel & Hansel Mieth, John Gutmann, Lisette Model, Marion Palfi, Robert Frank*. (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, 1995), 17.

¹¹ See Ken Light, *Witness in Our Time*; Susan Ehrens; Grace Schaub, "Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel: A Story of Love, Commitment and Search for Truth," *Photographer's Forum*, November 1994, 26-37; Grace Schaub, "Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel: Never Just Art," *View Camera*, January/February 1996, 20-27; *About the Documentary* (Nancy Shiesari's *Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer*), 23 July 1999, <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~hansel/About%20the%20Documentary.html> (23 October 2002). For information the film, see *Independent Lens: Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer*, The Film, n.d., <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hanselmieth/film.html> (3 September 2004).

¹² John G. Morris, "Hansel Mieth: A Love Story in Photography," *International Herald-Tribune*, September 26-27, 1992, no page number.

¹³ For more background on Mieth's early life, see Thomas Knubben, *Simple Life: Fotografen aus Amerika, 1929-1971*, *Simple Life: Photographs From America, 1929-1971*, trans. Ingeborg Reichardt and Carmen Baerens (Stuttgart: Schmetterling, 1991).

¹⁴ Hansel Mieth Hagel (narrator), "On the Life and Work of Otto Hagel and Hansel Mieth," *Left Curve*, 1988, 11.

¹⁵ Brown, "Hansel Mieth Gets Them to Pose," 113.

¹⁶ Mieth and Hagel were strong and life-long supporters of Bridges and his International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union. Hagel created *Men and Machines*, a photo essay and later a book documenting the mechanization of the California waterfront. Hagel also assisted author Charles R. Larrowe in his *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1972). The ILWU was among the left-wing unions expelled by the CIO in 1950. See Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994) and *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).

¹⁷ John Loengard, "Peter Stackpole" (interview), *LIFE Photographers: What They Saw* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1998), 59.

¹⁸ Sally Stein, "On Location: The Placement (and Replacement) of California in 1930s Photography," in Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort, eds., *Reading California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900-*

2000 (Los Angeles and Berkeley: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and University of California Press, 2000), 183. As Stein noted, the San Francisco street scene photographs were part of a larger series Mieth called *The Great Hunger*, which included images of Sacramento Hoovervilles and migrant farm workers. Also see Susan Ehrens, "Hansel Mieth," *Photo Metro* 5:49 (May 1987), 5-12.

¹⁹ John Loengard, "Hansel Mieth" (interview), *LIFE Photographers: What They Saw* (Boston: Bulfinch Press), 1998, 78.

²⁰ Otto Hagel, "Toward Clarification—A Question of Reality," December 7, 1966, 142. Unpublished manuscript, Otto Hagel/Hansel Mieth Archive, Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, (hereafter cited as Mieth Archive).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

²² Loengard, "Hansel Mieth," 78.

²³ Letter from Wilson Hicks to Hansel Mieth, January 30, 1939, Mieth Archives.

²⁴ Hansel Mieth, Untitled autobiographical manuscript, n.d., Mieth Archives (hereafter cited as Mieth manuscript). In the manuscript, Mieth called herself Maria Mann; Otto was Ernest; Wilson Hicks was Mr. Blake; John Shaw Billings was David Sutton; Henry Robinson Luce was Aldous Byron Chase; and *Life* magazine was *Era* magazine.

²⁵ Mieth manuscript, 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35, 37.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Margaretta Mitchell, "Remembering Hansel Mieth: A Photojournalist Who Championed the Downtrodden," *ASMP* (American Society of Media Photographers) *Bulletin*, April 1998, 14.

³⁴ Mieth manuscript, 108. Mieth referred to Capa as Jaques Bella in the manuscript.

³⁵ Mitchell, "Remembering Hansel Mieth," 14.

³⁶ Light, *Witness in Our Time*, 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Hansel Mieth to Vicki Goldberg, June 9, 1982, quoted in Vicki Goldberg, *Margaret Bourke-White* (New York : Harper & Row, 1986), 195.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Hansel Mieth to Vicki Goldberg, June 9, 1982, Margaret Bourke-White Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library, Syracuse, New York.

⁴¹ Mieth's *Life* cover stories were "Spring Lambs," May 25, 1937; "Garment Workers at Play [Women in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union]," August 1, 1938; and "Dionne's Communion," September 2, 1940.

⁴² "Life's Pictures," *Life*, May 24, 1937, 82.

⁴³ "Life's Pictures," *Life*, March 28, 1938, 64.

⁴⁴ These stories included "Animal Experimentation: Is It Essential to the Progress of Medicine?," *Life*, October 24, 1938, 46-53 "Barnyard Animals With Neuroses Hold Clue to Human Breakdowns," *Life*, October 30, 1939, 80-85; "Cancer: Exploration of Its Nature and Cause Will be Organized in National Research Center," *Life*, June 17, 1940, 35-38; "The Heart: Its Diseases Are Now the Major Factor in the U.S. Death Rate," *Life*, September 16,

1940, 37-40; "Deaf-Blind Children Learn to 'See and Hear' Through Sense of Touch," *Life*, November 18, 1940, 41-44.

⁴⁵ "First American Monkey Colony Starts on Puerto Rico Islet," *Life*, January 2, 1939, 26.

⁴⁶ Robert W. Sussman, "Piltdown Man: The Father of American Field Primatology," in Shirley C. Strum and Linda M. Fedigan, eds., *Primate Encounters: Models of Science, Gender, and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 85-103; Donna Haraway, "A Semiotics of the Naturalistic Field: From C.R. Carpenter to S.A. Altmann, 1930-1955," in Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 84-111.

⁴⁷ The colony's establishment received more attention in scholarly publications than in the popular press, but it was reported in the *New York Times Magazine*. See George H. Copeland, "Wanted: More Monkeys," *New York Times Magazine*, December 8, 1940, 25. For a report of Carpenter's research at the colony, see C.R. Carpenter, "Sexual Behavior of Free Ranging Rhesus Monkeys (*Macaca Mulatta*)," *Journal of Comparative Psychology* 33: 1 (1942), 113-162.

⁴⁸ Today the Cayo Santiago colony is one of three facilities that constitute the Caribbean Primate Research Center (CPRC), a research, training and education unit of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), Medical Sciences Campus. The CPRC is supported by a core grant from the National Institutes of Health, National Center for Research Resources, Comparative Medicine Program and the UPR. See *Unit of Comparative Medicine Homepage*, n.d., <http://ucm.rcm.upr.edu/cprc.html> (22 September 2004).

⁴⁹ William F. Windle, "The Cayo Santiago Primate Colony," *Science* 209 (September 26, 1980), 1486-1491. This article included Mieth's famous picture, but with a remarkably different explanation: "Adult male pigtail macaque driven into the sea by his photographer on Cayo Santiago." It also incorrectly states that the photograph "was first printed on the cover of *Life* magazine." Windle, "The Cayo Santiago Primate Colony," 1489.

⁵⁰ "Picture of the Week," *Life*, January 16, 1939, 17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵² "Letters to the Editor," *Life*, February 6, 1939, 2.

⁵³ "Letters to the Editor," *Life*, August 5, 1940, 2.

⁵⁴ *The Best of LIFE* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1973), 302.

⁵⁵ *LIFE: The First 50 Years: 1936-1986* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986), 27.

⁵⁶ Edward K. Thompson, *A Love Affair with Life & Smithsonian* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 59.

⁵⁷ Susan Ehrens, "Hansel Mieth," *Photo Metro* 5:49 (May 1987), 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Hansel Mieth to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, n.d., Mieth Archive.

⁶⁰ McCabe, "A Life in Pictures," 9.

⁶¹ Alison Jolly, "The Bad Old Days of Primatology?" in Shirley C. Strum and Linda M. Fedigan, eds., *Primate Encounters: Models of Science, Gender, and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 71-84.

⁶² Quoted in Grace Schaub, "Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel: A Story of Love, Commitment and a Search for Truth," *Photographer's Forum*, November 1994, 34.

⁶³ The term "glamour feature" was essentially a euphemism for sexual (and usually sexist) content. Various observers have noted that *Life's* success formula included the selective use of voyeuristic female nudity and other "salacious" material. See James L. Baughman, "Who Read *Life*?" in Doss, ed., *Looking at Life*, 46-47. For an analysis of *Life's* "cheesecake protocol," see Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream*. For a discussion of nudity in early *Life*, see Dolores Flamiano, "The (Nearly) Naked Truth: Gender, Race, and Nudity in *Life*, 1937," *Journalism History* 28:3 (Fall 2002), 121-136.

⁶⁴ Hansel Mieth, "The Woman," unpublished manuscript, n.d., 8, Mieth Archive.

⁶⁵ Mieth manuscript, 132.

⁶⁶ *Independent Lens: Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer*, Talkback, 2 June 2003 <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hanselmieth/talkback.html> (3 September 2004).

⁶⁷ These stories included "Negroes," *Life*, October 3, 1938, 48-59 (Mieth contributed several photos to this essay) and "Garment Workers at Play [Women in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union]," August 1, 1938.

⁶⁸ For instance, features on the birth of a baby and cancer (with illustrations that some readers considered too graphic) brought the magazine praise for providing useful, educational material and condemnation for violating standards of good taste. See "U.S. Science Wars Against an Unknown Enemy: Cancer," *Life*, March 1, 1937, 11-17; "Doctors Present 'Birth of a Baby' in Welfare Movie," *Life*, April 11, 1938, 33-36. Managing Editor John Shaw Billings acknowledged that the cancer feature was "pretty strong for the layman" but also noted that he was "proud of this cancer opus; it is a significant document in pictures." February 18 and 19, 1937, John Shaw Billings diary, Billings Manuscript Collection, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina (hereafter cited as Billings diary). If published letters to the editor were representative, then reader reaction was evenly split between enthusiastic appreciation for the straightforward and graphic facts about cancer and its treatment and shocked outrage at the "repulsive" and "gruesome" photos. Several readers reported tearing out and/or burning the offending pages. See "Letters to the Editor," *Life*, March 22, 1937, 76. The childbirth feature created even more controversy. According to Billings, Luce (who was normally stingy with his praise) called the childbirth story "magnificent." However, the issue that carried the story was "banned in Boston & New England—the work of reactionary Catholics who believe it is obscene & indecent to be born." The censoring of *Life* extended beyond New England and was a front-page news story. April 5 and 7, 1938, Billings diary.

⁶⁹ Mieth manuscript, 39.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 67.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 80, 82.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷⁷ Popular magazines tended to discuss birth control as a controversy, often framing the debate in eugenicist terms. One argument against birth control was that it was used mainly by the "better classes," thereby encouraging "breeding from the bottom." See "Is Birth Control a National Menace?" *The Reader's Digest*, July 1938, 90-94.

⁷⁸ For a history of racist eugenics in the southern states, see Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). Many non-southern states, including California, practiced eugenic sterilization. See Philip R. Reilly, *The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁷⁹ For an analysis of the relationship between birth control, sterilization, and racism, see Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) and Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001). For a consideration of the sometimes contradictory impact of sterilization programs on women's reproductive autonomy, see Johanna Schoen, "Between Choice and Coercion: Women and the Politics of Sterilization in North Carolina, 1929-1975," *Journal of Women's History* 13:1 (Spring 2001), 132-156.

⁸⁰ In 2003 at public hearings on the history of North Carolina's state-run eugenics program, lawmakers heard testimony from women who were sterilized against their will. The hearings were part of the state's efforts to draft a proposal to compensate survivors of the program. See Rebecca Sinderbrand, "Eugenics: Clearing the Collective Conscience," *Newsweek*, June 2, 2003, 12.

⁸¹ Accounts of North Carolina's pioneering program emphasized the race and class issues at work in the state: about 29 percent of the state's population was Negro and the official policy was to provide contraceptive advice only to medically indigent mothers. See Roy Norton, "A Health Department Birth Control Program," *American Journal of Public Health*, March 1939, 253-256; George M. Cooper, Frances Roberta Pratt, and Margaret Jarman Hagood, "Four Years of Contraception as a Public Health Service in North Carolina," *American Journal of Public Health*, December 1941, 1248-1252.

⁸² Mieth manuscript, 81.

⁸³ "Birth Control: South Carolina Uses It for Public Health," *Life*, May 6, 1940, 65.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ This prejudice was held by the educated and uneducated alike: "Some physicians of the day were overtly judgmental and spoke of blacks as having earned their illnesses as just recompense for wicked life-styles." James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 22.

⁸⁷ See Jones, *Bad Blood*; Susan M. Reverby, ed., *Tuskegee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskegee Syphilis Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁸⁸ Mieth manuscript, 103.

⁸⁹ Unfortunately, there are no unpublished photos from this assignment in the Mieth archive.

⁹⁰ Mieth manuscript, 104, 105.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 126.

⁹³ "Nurse Midwife," *Life*, December 3, 1951, 134-145. Smith's story was photographed in the South Carolina Village of Pineville, in Berkeley County on the edge of Hell Hole Swamp—exactly the same location as Mieth's story. Mieth admired Smith and spoke fondly of his long conversations with her and Otto. See Light, *Witness in Our Time*, 21-22.

⁹⁴ W. Eugene Smith, quoted in Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper, "Interview with W. Eugene Smith: an excerpt, in Vicki Goldberg, ed., *Photography in Print* (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 438.

⁹⁵ Mieth manuscript, 93.

⁹⁶ Her wartime assignments were infrequent and her published photos were often small and unremarkable. She contributed to the following stories: "Milk: US Produces Enough for Itself and Allies," *Life*, May 4, 1942, 63-70; "No. 1 Shipbuilder" (Henry Kaiser of Oakland), *Life*, June 29, 1942, 88-89; "Information Please" (Office of War Information), *Life*, July 27, 1942, 39; "Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever," *Life*, September 7, 1942, 92-97; "War Metals" (Mining), *Life*, December 7, 1942, 116-117; "Wood" (with Otto Hagel), *Life*, January 4, 1943, 54-55; "*Life* Goes on a Marine Ace's Honeymoon" (with Ottot Hagel), *Life*, 98-104. After the war, *Life* published two Mieth-Hagel collaborations, "We Return to Fellbach" (1950) and "The Simple Life" (1955).

⁹⁷ See McCabe, "A Life in Pictures," *This World*, 9; Schaub, "Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel," *Photographer's Forum*, 36; Schaub, "Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel," *View Camera*, 27.

⁹⁸ Some accounts of Mieth's life and work have referred to her blacklisting claim but have not cited evidence to support this claim. See Ken Conner, "Hansel Mieth—Admired Photojournalist" (obituary), *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 17, 1998, B8; "Passing Torches: The Diverse Sources of Documentary," *Mother Jones 1998 Fine Print Portfolio*, 5. John Loengard, however, has expressed skepticism about Mieth's blacklisting claim,

suggesting instead that she and Hagel stopped getting work because they left New York and took up farming. Loengard, personal correspondence with author, January 27, 2003. See also, John Loengard, "Otto Hagel: He Bypassed Fame to Be One Half of Photography's Best Love Story," *American Photo*, March/April 2002, 40.

⁹⁹ Sally Stein observed that Mieth and Hagel held Marxist views and were thoroughly marginalized in the postwar anti-Communist witch hunt. Stein, "On Location," 183, 196 (n. 33). She also noted that "by the end of the war [Mieth and Hagel's] relations with Time Inc. became strained with the rise of anti-communism." Stein, "Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel," *Original Sources*, 127-128.

¹⁰⁰ As Stein has noted, "the Red Scare's impact on the major East Coast publishers is a history that remains to be told. The experience of Hagel and Mieth is doubtless one element in a larger story." Stein, *Original Sources*, 129. Journalists were fired after they defied congressional committees. See Schrecker, "Blacklists and Other Economic Sanctions," in *The Age of McCarthyism*, 76-86. But there were many other ways to rein in journalists, short of blacklisting. Mieth may have been a victim of content censorship, because stories about "racial issues or civil liberties were verboten." See Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 400.

¹⁰¹ Time-Life did use a few of the Heart Mountain photos in commemorative books about World War II.

¹⁰² *The Heart Mountain Story: Photographs by Hansel Mieth and Otto Hagel of the World War II Internment of Japanese Americans* (Los Gatos, CA: Mamoru Inouye, 1997).

¹⁰³ Grace Schaub, "The Compassionate Eye," in *The Heart Mountain Story* (Los Gatos, CA: Mamoru Inouye, 1997), 9.

¹⁰⁴ "Eastward Ho," *Time*, March 16, 1942, 14; Frank J. Taylor, "The People Nobody Wants," *Saturday Evening Post*, May 9, 1942, 24, 67; Jim Marshall, "The Problem People," *Collier's*, August 15, 1942, 52.

¹⁰⁵ C.L. Dedrick, quoted in Taylor, "The People Nobody Wants," 67.

¹⁰⁶ Ernest K. Lindley, "Problems of Japanese Migration," *The Nation*, March 30, 1942, 26.

¹⁰⁷ Two magazines that consistently published critical views of the internment were *The Nation* and *The Christian Century*.

¹⁰⁸ An early and consistent critic of the internment was columnist and author Carey McWilliams. A reviewer of his book *Prejudice—Japanese-Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance*, wrote: "It may be difficult for some to realize the close relationship between the wartime Japanese-American situation, the so-called Negro problem, and all other forms of race hatred. It will not be difficult once one has read McWilliam's thorough-going expose of the West Coast situation." See "California's 'Undeclared War,'" *Newsweek*, October 16, 1944, 96.

¹⁰⁹ For accounts of postwar anti-Japanese-American discrimination, see "American Fair Play?," *Time*, March 19, 1945, 19; "Japs are Human," *Time*, June 25, 1945, 18; "The Nisei Go Back," *Time*, December 25, 1944, 14; Carey McWilliams, "Strange Homecoming," *The Nation*, December 30, 1944, 797.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Joan Murray, "Concerned Photography (review of "A Lifetime of Concerned Photography," Eye Gallery, San Francisco), *Artweek*, July 1, 1989, 11-12.

¹¹² Nancy Schiesari, "Heart Mountain," *Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer*, 23 July 1999, <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~hansel/Heart%20Mountain.html> (23 October 2002).

¹¹³ A number of factors may have contributed to the magazine's rejection of the Heart Mountain photo essay, including the camp's bleak, remote, and extremely cold location, which no doubt contributed to the sense of injustice and victimization conveyed by the essay. California camps were featured in published essays photographed by Ansel Adams and Carl Mydans. Also, Mieth and Hagel may have been perceived as biased observers because of their German ancestry (unlike Adams and Mydans).

¹¹⁴ "Coast Japs Are Interned in Mountain Camp," *Life*, April 6, 1942, 15-19.

¹¹⁵ "Tule Lake: At This Segregation Center Are 18,000 Japanese Considered Disloyal to the U.S.," *Life*, March 20, 1944, 25-35.

¹¹⁶ Walt Stromer, "Why I Went Along: 1942 and the Invisible Evacuees," *Columbia Journalism Review*, January-February 1993, 15-17.

¹¹⁷ Karin Becker Orhn, "What You See Is What You Get: Dorothea Lange and Ansel Adams at Manzanar," *Journalism History* 4:1 (Spring 1977), 15, 18.

¹¹⁸ Stromer, "Why I Went Along," 15.

¹¹⁹ Adams seemed to take a more critical view of the internment after the war. See his *Born Free and Equal* (publisher, 1944). His Manzanar photographs were exhibited in 1944 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. See also *Suffering Under a Great Injustice: Ansel Adams's Photographs of Japanese-American Internment at Manzanar* (Washington, DC: Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, 2002). *American Memory: Suffering Under a Great Injustice*, 20 February 2002, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aamhtml/> (22 September 2004).

¹²⁰ Mieth and Lange were friends; Hagel and Mieth lived with Lange and her husband Paul Taylor for several months after relocating to California from New York. For Lange's WRA photographs, see Maisie and Richard Conrat, *Executive Order 9066: The Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans* (Los Angeles: California Historical Society, 1972).

¹²¹ Jimmie Akiya, quoted in Todd S. Inoue, "Barbed Memories," *metroACTIVE*, September 18, 1997, 4. <http://metroactive.com/papers/metro/09.18.97/arts-9738.html> (13 November 1999).

¹²² Germans and Italians were also considered enemy aliens, although they were not subjected to the racist treatment suffered by the Japanese.

¹²³ "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese," *Life*, December 22, 1941, 81-82.

¹²⁴ For instance, after meeting with an art director *Life* was trying to woo away from Conde Nast, Billings wrote, "Agha is a Turk and gives me the creeps. . . He's a different breed from our crowd--& I'm a xenophobe," June 29, 1938, Billings diary. Elsewhere in the diary, he expressed contempt for other minorities.

¹²⁵ After Matsui was fired by Hicks, she refused to transfer to another department of the magazine. According to her husband (*Life* photographer John Philips), Peggy "resigned, came home and never went out of the house after that." She died of septicemia a few months later. Loengard, "Hansel Mieth," *LIFE Photographers*, 78.

¹²⁶ Brown, "Hansel Mieth Gets Them to Pose," 114.

¹²⁷ Nancy Shiesari, *Independent Lens: Hansel Mieth: Vagabond Photographer*, Filmmaker Q&A, n.d., <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hanselmieth/qanda.html> (3 September 2004).

¹²⁸ Otto Hagel, "Toward Clarification," 144.

¹²⁹ Mieth Hagel, "On the Life and Work," *Left Curve*, 13.

¹³⁰ McCabe, "A Life in Pictures," 10.