This one is usually called the Arrow, because it concerns the time-interval during which an arrow is traveling from its bow to the target. Zeno observes that at any specific instance in this interval, the arrow occupies 'a space equal to itself,' which he says is the same as its being 'at rest.' The point is that the arrow cannot really be moving at an instant because motion requires an interval of time, and an instant here is not an interval; it's the tiniest temporal unit imaginable, and it has no duration, just as a geometric point has no dimension. And if, at each and every instant, the arrow is at rest, then the arrow does not ever move. In fact nothing whatsoever moves, really, since at any given instant everything is at rest.

from *Everything and More: A Compact History of* ∞ by David Foster Wallace

**6.1** It's July 2007 and I'm leading a workshop called "The Working Book." At the time I think of books in terms of mechanics. On the morning of the second day, I talk about the progression from the front to the back of a book of images.

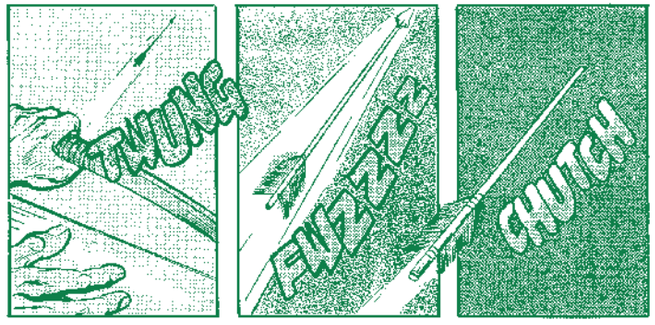
"If a book is time-based," I ask, "then how does motion and continuity function in a book of still images? What is the energy, force, and locomotion of reading? How are pictures and pages both still and in motion?"

Around then I had read *Everything and More: A Compact History of* ∞ by David Foster Wallace. For years I had been obsessed with the author and read everything he wrote, yet the only parts I retained of his history of ∞ were the descriptions of Zeno's anti-motion paradoxes.

On this morning of the workshop, I improvise the analogy that reading a book of still images is like the Arrow Paradox. Every individual still image may appear to occupy its own well-defined space where no time elapses, while also being a point along the path upon which you are impelled as you move forward through the book.

“If we imagine the opening of a book to be the arrow...

“released from its archer’s bow...




“and the closing of the book to be the point of the projectile reaching its target, then each moment of reading in between occupies a space equal to itself that may be viewed as motionless.

“But to read is to be in motion and make continuity out of past, present, and future moments,” I suggest.

As examples, we then browsed influential books made by photographers who drove around the country to make pictures, books by disheveled-looking white men in search of something romantic and symbolic of their present American moment starting with *American Photographs* by Walker Evans, and later *American Surfaces* by Steven Shore and *Sleeping by the Mississippi* and *Niagara* by Alec Soth, *A Shimmer of Possibility* by Paul Graham, and perhaps the most pivotal of these, Robert Frank’s masterpiece *The Americans*.

I had heard many lectures and interpretations of *The Americans*—its four chapters all beginning with American flags; how Frank’s two road trips in 1955 and ‘56 changed photography and recruited many copycat journeymen. Soth I heard publicly state that the path Frank charted throughout the United States was the figurative map to achievement in making a photobook. While photographing *Niagara*, when making several drives from his home in Minnesota’s Twin Cities to Niagara Falls, Soth kept a handwritten list taped to the steering wheel of his car that included prompts for the symbols he sought to photograph in the same way Frank pursued symbols of cars as coffins or jukeboxes as altars.

These symbols, and Frank’s quick-study, bitter, yet empathetic capacity to feel with the people in his pictures, became something of a touchstone for generations of photographers that followed. Part of its heredity is rooted in notions of documenting people in relation to places and therefore of a colonizing influence. Another is the structural use of poetic sequence that conceptually binds symbols in still images—one to another—to create metaphoric associations.

For instance, when I first read *The Americans*, I was surprised by the poignancy of Frank’s picture of a draped automobile parked beneath palm trees in Long Beach, California immediately followed by a photo of the tarp-covered victim of a car accident along Route 66 in Arizona.

Years later, while shadowing curator, photographer, and educator Nathan Lyons as he taught his “Image, Series, Sequence” workshop for the final time, I was somewhat disabused of the full poetry in Frank’s sequence. Offhand, Lyons commented that the car-cover-to-shrouded-dead-body sequence was perhaps “a little obvious.”


In the workshop Lyons showed 15th century emblem books that combined multiple symbols in a graphic array along with a short text, which, in combination, form a moral lesson or poetic allegory. What I gathered from the historical references was that if we consider each still image of a photobook to include one or several interpretable signs, and if we read the images one after another in sequence forming metaphorical comparison then a combinatoric, emblematic construct is implied through the progression.

In *The Americans,* there is a dual mode of stillness and continuity particularly reinforced because each recto photograph has the location of its making on its adjoining verso. Combining the images and text is representative of, if nothing else, the continuity of the road and the start-stopping of multiple signposts along its path.

In the collections of Visual Studies Workshop, founded by Lyons and where both of our workshops took place, a pair of Robert Frank’s shoes are archived. In 2014 I organized a public discussion there between photobook artist John Gossage and historian Gerry Badger where their theatrics of presentation included placing Frank’s shoes on stage beside their chairs to embody his myth for the audience. Legend has it that Frank wore the rubber-soled, tan and maroon wingtips while photographing *The Americans* while it is more likely that he left them in 1971 when in Rochester to lead a workshop in which he collaborated with an early group of VSW students to make the film *About Us*.

Frank is said to have gone by bicycle each morning to students' apartments to wake them up to film. In an early collaborative scene, Frank and the students attempt to film on Kodak grounds but are rebuffed by a security guard. The following sequence has the students pulling up to a gas station in a Volkswagen bus where Frank, fiercely committed to playing the station's attendant with an intense, open-mouth stare, repeatedly tells them to "fuck off."

The gas station attendant was perhaps inspired by the Kodak security guard in his small booth, if not by a lifetime of discouragement from photographing on private property. Frank reasons that the students he's collaborating with buy film from Kodak and just wish to film there.

Frank hands over his ID and a letter from Lyons and gives a certain look to the guard—a square-jawed, white guy wearing a uniform and a military-looking flattop, and much larger in stature than Frank—seeming to scan the guard for signs of intention.

I'm attracted to this scene for several reasons. One is that it's easy to be seduced by the photographer as nonconformist. Just by attempting to film on private property, he appears to be agitating. In my first month living in Rochester, I too was stopped by a Kodak security guard for photographing on company grounds, but the Kodak film exposed in *my* camera was indeed confiscated. I was making pictures as a student in a VSW workshop, where just days earlier we had spent hours studying and discussing *The Americans*.

Second, it is widely known that Frank, while on the road photographing *The Americans*, was arrested in November 1955 in McGehee, Arkansas. The Arkansas State Police arresting officer's report and a letter Frank wrote to Walker Evans forty hours after the arrest were both published years later in a monograph on Frank by VSW alumna Anne Wilkes Tucker.

FPT

Department of

# ARKANSAS STATE POLICE

P. O. BOX 1189

Little Rock, Arkansas

HERMAN E. LINDSEY
DIRECTOR

PHONE
MOHAWK 3-4115

December 19. 1955

Alan R. Templeton, Captain
Criminal Investigation Division
Arkansas State Police
Little Rock, Arkansas

Dear Captain Templeton:

On or about November 7, I was enroute to Dermott to attend to some business and about 2 o'clock I observed a 1950 or 1951 Ford with New York license, driven by a subject later identified as Robert Frank of New York City.

After stopping the car I noticed that he was shabbily dressed, needed a shave and a haircut, also a bath. Subject talked with a foreign accent. I talked to the subject a few minutes and looked into the car where I noticed it was heavily loaded with suitcases, trunks and a number of cameras.

Due to the fact that it was necessary for me to report to Dermott immediately, I placed the subject in the City Jail in McGehee until such time that I could return and check him out.

After returning from Dermott I questioned this subject. He was very uncooperative and had a tendency to be "smart-elecky" in answering the questions. Present during the questioning was Trooper Buren Jackson and Officer Ernest Crook of the McGehee Police Department.

We were advised that a Mr. Mercer Woolf of McGehee, who had some experience in counter-intelligence work during World War II and could read and speak several foreign languages, would be available to assist us in checking out this subject. Subject had numerous papers in foreign languages, including a passport that did not include his picture.

This officer investigated this subject due to the man's appearance, the fact that he was a foreigner and had in his possession cameras and felt that the subject should be checked out as we are continually being advised to watch out for any persons illegally in this country possibly in the employ of some unfriendly foreign power and the possibility of Communist affiliations.

Subject was fingerprinted in the normal routine of police investigation; one card being sent to Arkansas State Police Headquarters and one card to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Washington.

Respectfully submitted,
R. E. Brown, Lieutenant
Commanding
Troop #5
ARKANSAS STATE POLICE
Warren, Arkansas

REB:dlg



The most significant reason the security guard scene and Frank arrest story intrigues me, however, is that in 1955 my grandfather was a police officer in Wynne, Arkansas, about a hundred miles northeast of McGehee.

Papaw, as we grandchildren called him, was a WWII veteran, a blacksmith, and inventor of the tractor Porta-Pump to move water more easily for rice farming. Every year for St. Patrick's Day my sister and I mailed him cards of green, crayon-colored shamrocks or made of green construction paper. He was my only known relative who identified, however minimally, with ancestry from anywhere else in the world than Arkansas.

Once I asked my dad if he ever heard stories of forebears who had immigrated to the States and his reply was, "We're from Arkansas," saying it twice. "We're from Arkansas," meaning there were no outside ways of life.

Both my parents were born in Wynne and every summer they sent my sister and I to stay there for a week with our paternal grandparents. My grandma, Nanny, ran a beauty shop attached to the house. In the evenings I would sit with thighs stuck to a vinyl seat beneath a fold-down dryer dome, sipping disgusting Tab soda from a glass bottle while listening to women small-talking in the distinctive south midland dialect from where the Ozarks meet the Mississippi Delta. It was where my maternal grandmother got her hair done back when my mom was still a toddler, before her family left rice farming for steadier factory work outside Chicago, resettling there during the Great Migration north from the rural, agricultural south. The Chicago suburbs, where we also spent a week each summer, were more consistent with my Missouri-born existence as a kid. Nothing like the relative foreignness of Arkansas.

Papaw's stint in law enforcement started before '55 and his years as a Sheriff came a decade later, but I doubt the environment had changed much. If anything, I would expect that outgroup fear and suspicion had only increased following the 1957 Little Rock Nine high school integration and concurrent civil rights unrest in Arkansas and more prominently in neighboring southern states, Mississippi and Alabama. My aunt Muriel was in the Wynne high school when it was integrated with just two Black students in '58.

In thinking about Frank's '55 arrest, I often wonder what decision Sheriff Shaw would have made had he spied the 1950 Ford Business Coupe with New York plates driving on AR 1. Would he have pulled the car over to question the driver and inspect it as Lieutenant Brown had done?

As Sheriff, Papaw hired Wynne's first Black deputy and Dad tells a story of his boyhood that I've heard several times about occasions when Black men showed up at his house at night looking for my granfather. As Dad tells it, they had come to Sheriff Shaw's home to turn themselves in on warrants out for their arrest. They did so voluntarily in order to avoid being picked up by his deputy, Bo Hamrick.

Mom then invariably interjects, in a slightly distressed and condemnatory way, that Hamrick was like the archetypical, torturous, racist Southern police officer in every movie set in the Jim Crow American South. My parents mean this to speak for Papaw's integrity because by comparison to a racist, domineering deputy going outside the law, he didn't necessarily treat people as badly.

I've pressed Dad for more details, but his memory stops at Black men coming to the house for their voluntary arrest, the story now compacted into its mold of patriarchal myth making.

My own boyhood memory of my grandparent's home in Wynne has me asking, did the Black men take the front three steps to knock on the door and then back off the small porch to stand in the crunchy, brown, lifeless mat of grass while waiting for someone to answer? Or did they wait right outside the door, standing on the worn Astroturf and looking through the three irregular-paned windows into the house? If they could see inside, what did they make of the totally bizarre 1960s health appliance with a platform that you stood on and strapped a wide belt around your waist to supposedly vibrate away your love handles and butt fat, which for some reason was kept right inside the front door? Or did they go around to the side room where the lights of the beauty shop were on and a woman from town might be under a dryer as late as 8pm? Were Black men ever invited into the house or shop while they waited for the sheriff to turn off the TV episode of "Gunsmoke," gather his hat, keys, pouch of Red Man chewing tobacco, and Styrofoam cup with its folded paper napkin inside to soak up spit, all stashed on his TV recliner side-table, before driving them to the Cross County jail?

That same jail, to my surprise, appeared on my phone screen while reading the *NY Times* in bed one August morning in 2019. Four Black boys, ages 15-16 were going door-to-door in their own neighborhood to sell tickets for the Wynne Yellowjackets football team. My dad played linebacker and fullback for the Yellowjackets in high school. When I was a second stringer on my own football team, I would sometimes fantasize about living in the tiny Arkansas town where I might have been good enough for first-team varsity or been held in higher esteem just for wearing the navy and gold Yellowjackets jersey that the four Black boys did that August day, going door-to-door. As the *Times* accounted

> One moment, they were laughing, having been frightened by a dog chasing them that had only wanted to play. The next, they were on the ground in a stranger's front yard with their hands behind their backs while a white woman with a handgun ordered them to stay put.
>
> The woman, who lived at the property, had already called her husband, a county jail administrator, who alerted the police. 'Upon arrival of our officers, four juveniles were found lying on the ground with a female adult with a gun standing,' Jackie Clark, the Wynne police chief, said in a statement.

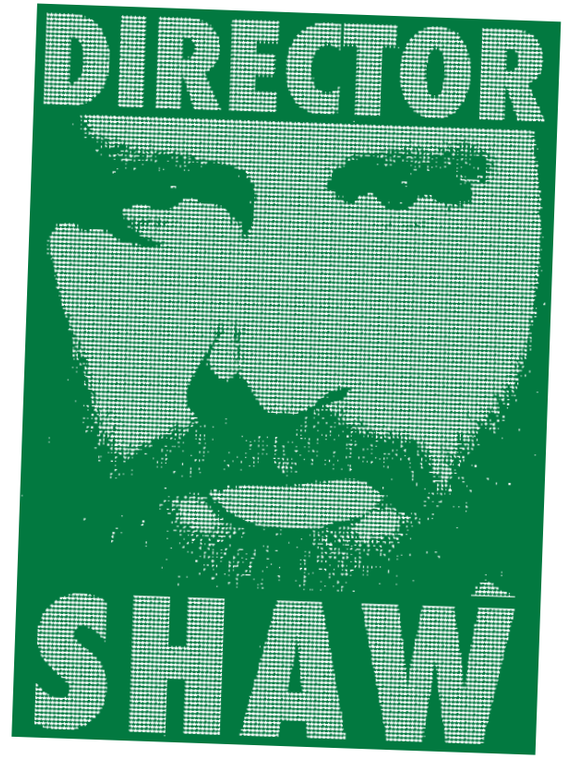
The white woman, Jerri Kelley, was ultimately charged with aggravated assault and false imprisonment. She noted in her statement that the four boys were Black, which raised her suspicion of criminality.

A couple of days after reading the article, I mentioned it to my mom on a phone call. She had read about the events too, but the report she read in the *Wynne Progress* didn't mention that the boys were Black and the woman white, as if it were not a racialized circumstance of the over-policing by entitled citizens of people with more melanized skin.

In thinking about my sheriff lineage as well as the white policing of Black bodies in relation to property I am unfortunately reminded of several other personal episodes.


On my first day officially working as the director of VSW, there was a scheduled mass cleanup of the grounds. A homeless man, who is Black, had made a shelter beneath the fire escape, and I directed the removal of his protective plywood roof, walls, bedding material, street drug baggies, and bicycle. I told others to clean up graffiti painted on the building.

The board president at the time, Bob, was a conservative retired cop and stakeholder in a security surveillance business. Bob praised me and aligned my efforts with NYC mayor Rudy Giuliani's policing policies, perhaps the worst ever for Black people in the city's history, and the Broken Windows theory that the removal of visible signs of nonconformity would reduce criminal behavior.




Another VSW board member jokingly made posters and handbills of a Big-Brother-like figure, Director Shaw, that he pasted around the building. Director Shaw was always watching.

More recently, another episode concerned my confrontation of the father of a student at the arts high school across the street from VSW. The high school lets out at 2:30pm and parents frequently show up in cars a half hour earlier, filling open spots in VSW's lot until they pick up and shuttle off their kids. At the time, a neighboring building that shares the lot had construction vehicles parked in half the spaces, so when the parents came early, there would sometimes be no spaces available for VSW students to park when they arrived for a 2pm class. During this period of construction, I would occasionally be in the lot around the time parents arrived and, if all the spaces were filled, I would sometimes ask them to please park elsewhere.

Once, however, I approached a station wagon where behind the wheel sat a medium-sized Black man with graying, shoulder-length dreadlocks. Staring straight ahead through the windshield, he would not acknowledge me when I approached his door waving at him or when I pantomimed for him to roll down his window.


He simply stared straight ahead without acknowledgment. I called to him through the glass to ask that he please not park here, saying that the spots in the lot are already limited from the construction.

When he finally turned to look at me, lowering the window a few inches, he asked me for my school identification, which I couldn't produce because we don't exactly have or need IDs where I teach, whereas I noticed a lanyard around his neck for the city public schools and saw that he too worked in education.

"Why should I believe you?" he asked, and my kneejerk response was to then pull out my phone and show him the organization's website including the picture of the building next to the lot where he was parked, and my name on the Contacts page as Director, going so far as to pull out my driver's license to prove I was who I claimed to be, but he remained unmoved.

"Why shouldn't I park here?" he pressed, which then raised my anxiety or got my dander up, my face getting hot, my stature expanding and speech turning into what my spouse calls Director Shaw voice as I told him again about the limited spots for our own students and our ownership of the property, and then I veered off into stories of car break-ins and thefts as additional justification for my policing.

"Oh because I'm Black, now you're going to get your cars broken into?" he reasoned, which stunned me.

"No, no, no, I never said that. It's not about that at all," I reacted.

"You just said I shouldn't park here because of crime."

"That isn't what I meant," I denied while backing away.

"I'm not going to park here anymore," he dejectedly called out to me.

Had I inherited the policing of property against outgroup members with darker-skinned bodies? Clearly so, in terms of my own internalized racism that will ensnare me in its trap when I least suspect it.

For months afterwards, and to this day I will look out the window or walk the block to get a coffee around 2:30pm, half looking for the man who sat in his own car, in a semi-private lot, off the street, where it was safe and easy for his child to find him, though his child is surely graduated by now. And fifteen years later, I occasionally see the homeless man I had removed, around Rochester. He is in a wheelchair now, his legs amputated above the knees and his mind appearing more distressingly afflicted with each passing year.

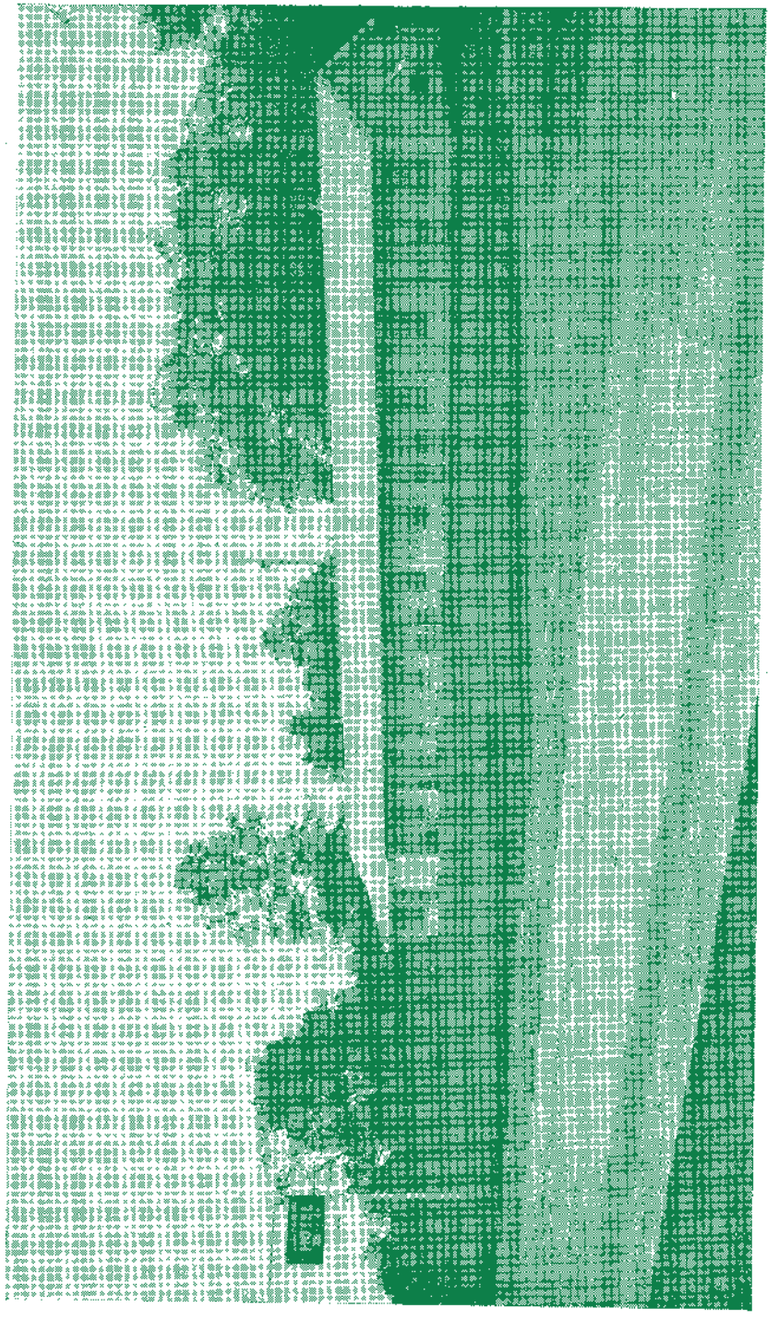
In the end I acknowledge to have perhaps as much in common with the cop who stopped Robert Frank as any observational perception and courage admired in the photographer.

And while Frank is lionized for his empathetic sense of the times as well as having suffered some minimal consequences of the policing of his perceived outgroup position, we rarely think of his own freedom and entitlement to make the work he did in 1955 and '56. Would a woman photographer's freedom of travel and access have been the same? How would Sheriff Shaw or Deputy Hamrick have treated a smart aleck, shabbily dressed Black man, in need of a bath, shave, and haircut, traveling on highway AR 1 in a 1950 Ford Business Coupe with New York plates in which he found cameras, film, and a two-thirds empty bottle of Hennessey?

If Frank were Black and traveling by car in '55, in addition to word-of-mouth recommendations of trusted sources, he may have relied upon a *Green Book* guide that was used by Black travelers to locate restaurants, gas stations, and lodgings where they were less likely to be harassed or physically hurt. In the 1955 edition is the U.S. Bond's Motel in Madison, Arkansas, just a few miles from Wynne. From there you take AR 1 about twenty miles south toward Forrest City, continuing another hundred miles and connecting to US 65 to arrive in McGehee where Frank was briefly jailed by Lieutenant Brown.

How would that encounter have gone if Frank were Black? Would he have been feared to be a communist spy or perhaps a meddlesome reporter or organizer against Jim Crow sent from the north? Would Brown have pulled his pistol on a Black man driving a car with NY plates the way Jerri Kelley held hostage the Black boys she didn't consider part of her own neighborhood?

I had considered none of these thoughts about Frank's relative ease of travel in the States when leading "The Working Book" workshop, nor was a gender-or race-based cultural framework of Frank's *The Americans* ever taught to me. What inspired me then was the heroic legend of Frank who artfully documented post-war America and later the workshop he taught in 1971 that was the collaborative *making of*—rather than teaching *how to make*—a film.



Encouraged by the legend of Frank, after discussing road photobooks and sequence on day two of "The Working Book," I had arranged to borrow the longtime VSW bookkeeper's minivan so the participants and I could take it out on a daylong road trip during which we would make stops along the way to photograph.

After weaving the minivan out of Rochester, in romantic acknowledgment of the American mythos of the open road, I put on Bob Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited*.

The album starts with a snare shot like a film set's slate clapping at the beginning of a scene.

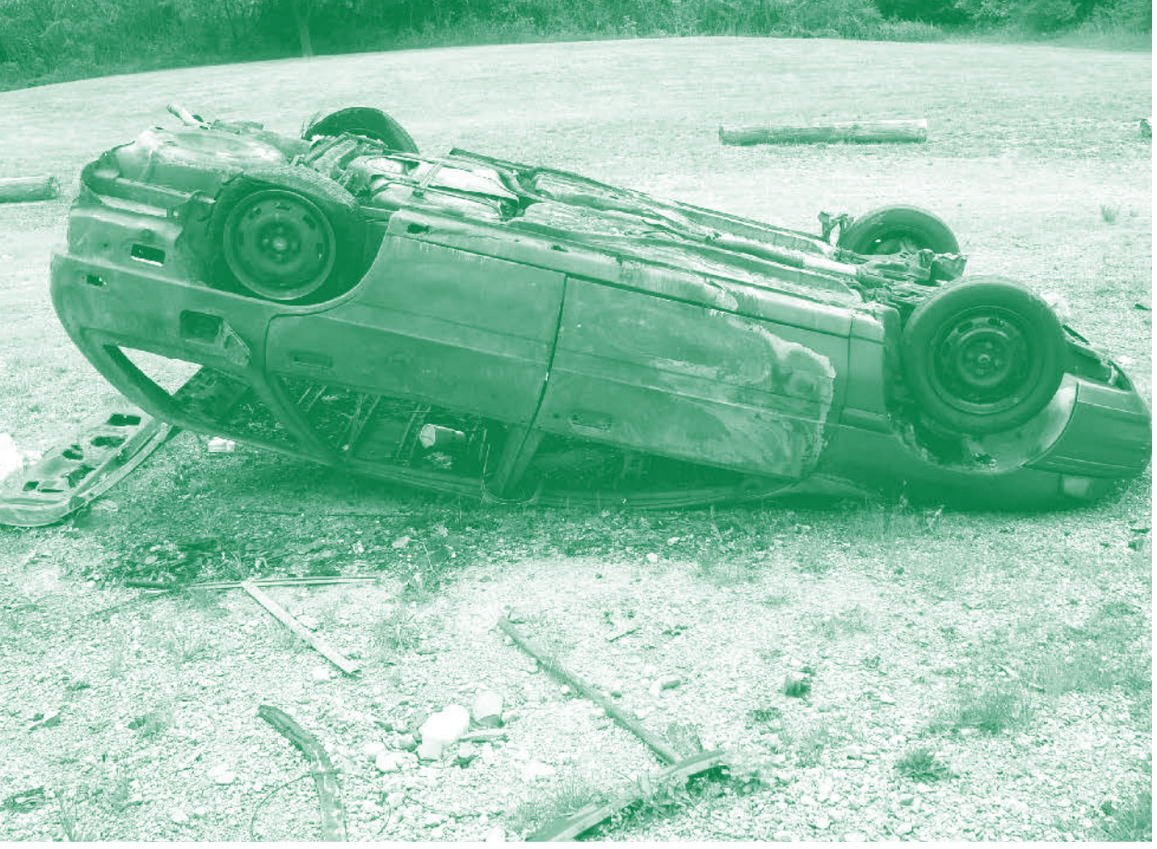
We take NY State Routes 5 and 20, both original east-to-west, cross-state highways, before the NY Thruway was constructed in the 50s. Routes 5 and 20 overlap in two places, a section east of Rochester near the Finger Lakes and a section west of Rochester near Lake Erie. We are on the eastern concurrency that connects several small towns.

A half hour into the drive, someone calls out for me to stop. I turn left down a gravel driveway leading us around the back of a nondescript, industrial building where, remarkably, a flipped car lay rusting and appeared to have been set on fire at some point, perhaps used to train the volunteer fire department, I deduce.

photo by Robyn York

After the accidental spark of this first photo stop, an almost mystical connectivity courses through me as if we are going to find such a talisman of the road, worthy of photographing at every stop. I tune in to Dylan and the album's title track with its shambolic piano and groove evoking blues legends connected to Highway 61: Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Son House, Mimi Smith, and others. Graceland is a few miles off Highway 61 and just blocks from my parents first apartment together in Memphis. A few miles away it connects to The Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King Jr. was killed, three years after *Highway 61 Revisited* was released. Up north the route goes through Duluth, Minnesota where Dylan was born. A piercing slide whistle, both zany and slightly panic-inducing, cuts through the groove. Dylan sings:

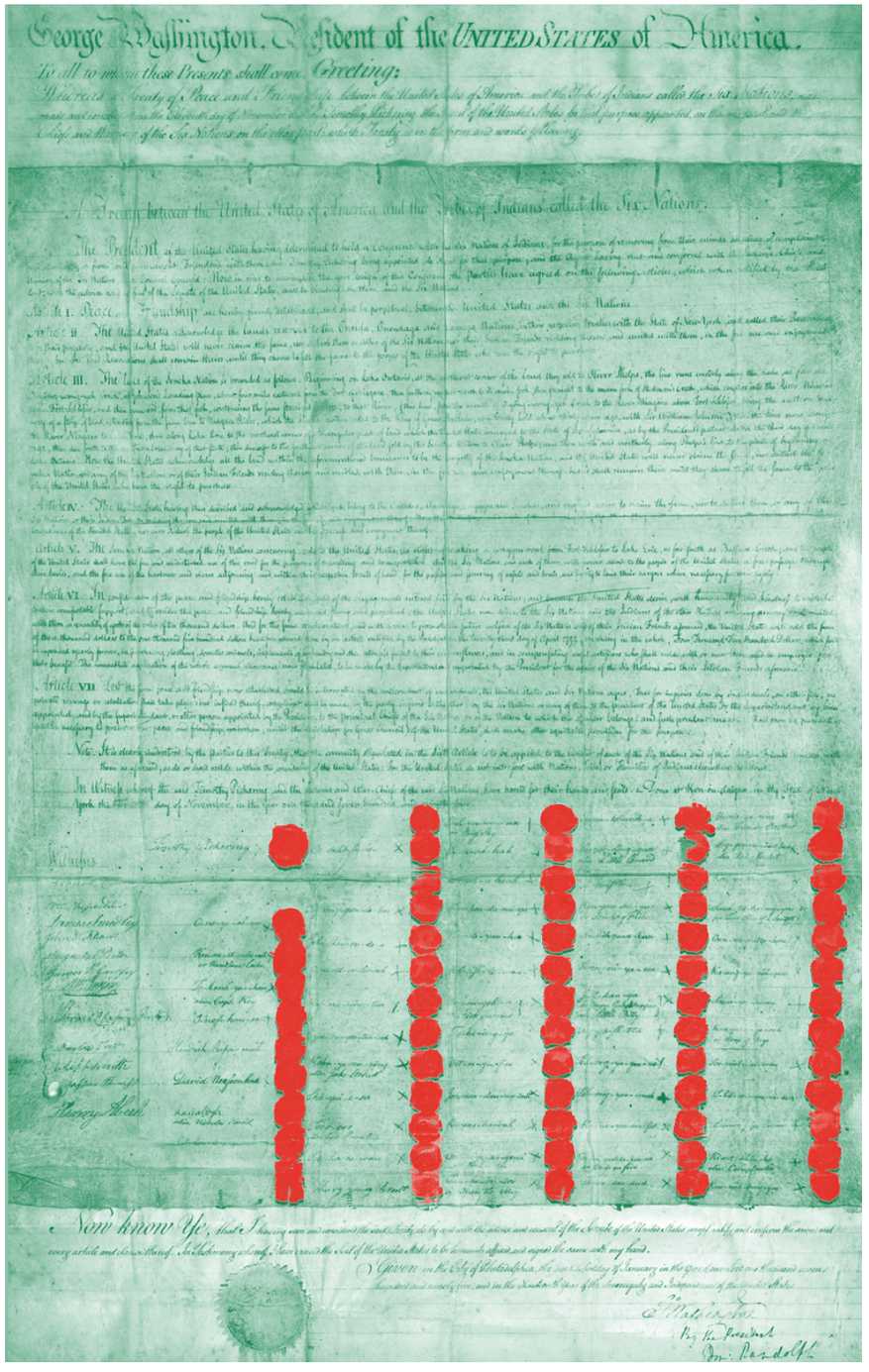
> Oh, God said to Abraham, "Kill me a son"
> Abe says, "Man, you must be puttin' me on"
> God say, "No."
> Abe says, "What?"
> God say, "You can do what you want, Abe, but
> The next time you see me comin', you better run"
> Well Abe says, "Where you want this killin' done?"
> God says, "Out on Highway 61"



Like the interposing slide whistle, someone calls for lunch and knows a nearby Mexican place. After carnitas and margaritas we photograph around the town of Canandaigua, the site of a 1794 treaty signing that affirmed land rights in Western New York for the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy and promised peace and friendship between the nascent United States and long-established Haudenosaunee Nations.

Afterward we headed further east stopping at several unremarkable locations. A sense of dissolution settles in by the mid-afternoon. One student I see in the rearview mirror is leaning forward in her seat deeply searching through the windshield.

Finally, she questions where we are and where we're going, stating her worry that we won't be back before her child's daycare closes. She doesn't want him to wait for her or to have to pay the extra fees she can't afford if she returns past 6pm.



I don't confess it, but I didn't bring a map and only tentatively know where we are and how long it will take to return. Aside from arranging the van, the entire experience is improvised. It hadn't occurred to me when or how it would end, nor that any of the passengers would have anything or anyone else to attend to that day aside from photographing.