The Family of Man

The greatest photographic exhibition of all time—503 pictures from 68 countries—created by Edward Steichen for the Museum of Modern Art

Prologue by Carl Sandburg
And God said, let there be light  

Genesis 1:3

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The first cry of a newborn baby in Chicago or Zamboango, in Amsterdam or Rangoon, has the same pitch and key, each saying, "I am! I have come through! I belong! I am a member of the Family."

Many the babies and grownups here from photographs made in sixty-eight nations round our planet Earth. You travel and see what the camera saw. The wonder of human mind, heart, wit and instinct, is here. You might catch yourself saying, "I’m not a stranger here."

People! flung wide and far, born into toil, struggle, blood and dreams, among lovers, eaters, drinkers, workers, loafers, fighters, players, gamblers. Here are ironworkers, brickmen, musicians, sandhogs, miners, builders of huts and skyscrapers, jungle hunters, landlords and the landless, the loved and the unloved, the lonely and abandoned, the brutal and the compassionate—one big family hugging close to the ball of Earth for its life and being.

Here or there you may witness a startling harmony where you say, "This will be haunting me a long time with a loveliness I hope to understand better."

In a seething of saints and sinners, winners or losers, in a womb of superstition, faith, genius, crime, sacrifice, here is the People, the one and only source of armies, navies, work-gangs, the living flowing breath of the history of nations, ever lighted by the reality or illusion of hope. Hope is a sustaining human gift.

Everywhere is love and love-making, weddings and babies from generation to generation keeping the Family of Man alive and continuing. Everywhere the sun, moon and stars, the climates and weathers, have meanings for people. Though meanings vary, we are alike in all countries and tribes in trying to read what sky, land and sea say to us. Alike and ever alike we are on all continents in the need of love, food, clothing, work, speech, worship, sleep, games, dancing, fun. From tropics to arctics humanity lives with these needs so alike, so inexorably alike.

Hands here, hands gnarled as thorn tree roots and others soft as faded rose leaves. Hands reaching, praying and groping, hands holding tools, torches, brooms, fishing nets, hands doubled in fists of flaring anger, hands moving in curses of beloved faces. The hands and feet of children playing ring-around-a-rosy—countries and languages different but the little ones alike in playing the same game.

Here are set forth babies arriving, suckling, growing into youths restless and questioning. Then as grownups they seek and hope. They mate, toil, fish, quarrel, sing, fight, pray, on all parallels and meridians having likeness. The earliest man, ages ago, had tools, weapons, cattle, as seen in his cave drawings. And like him the latest man of our day has his tools, weapons, cattle. The earliest man struggled through inexpressibly dark chaos of hunger, fear, violence, sex. A long journey it has been from that early Family of Man to the one of today which has become a still more prodigious spectacle.

If the human face is "the masterpiece of God" it is here then in a thousand fateful registrations. Often the faces speak what words can never say. Some tell of eternity and others only the latest tattlings. Child faces of blossom smiles or mouths of hunger are followed by homely faces of majesty carved and worn by love, prayer and hope, along with others light and carefree as thistles down in a late summer wind. Faces having land and sea on them, faces honest as the morning sun flooding a clean kitchen with light, faces crooked and lost and wondering where to go this afternoon or tomorrow morning. Faces in crowds.
laughing and windblown leaf faces, profiles in an instant of agony, mouths in a dumbshow mockery lacking speech, faces of music in gay song or a twist of pain, a hate ready to kill, or calm and ready-for-death faces. Some of them are worth a long look now and deep contemplation later. Faces betokening a serene blue sky or faces dark with storm winds and lashing night rain. And faces beyond forgetting, written over with faiths in men and dreams of man surpassing himself. An alphabet here and a multiplication table of living breathing human faces.

In the times to come as the past there will be generations taking hold as though loneliness and the genius of struggle has always dwelt in the hearts of pioneers. To the question, “What will the story be of the Family of Man across the near or far future?” some would reply, “For the answers read if you can the strange and baffling eyes of youth.”

There is only one man in the world
and his name is All Men.
There is only one woman in the world
and her name is All Women.
There is only one child in the world
and the child’s name is All Children.

A camera testament, a drama of the grand canyon of humanity, an epic woven of fun, mystery and holiness—here is the Family of Man!
Introduction by
Edward Steichen

I believe The Family of Man exhibition, produced and shown first at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and now being circulated throughout the world, is the most ambitious and challenging project photography has ever attempted.

The exhibition, now permanently presented on the pages of this book, demonstrates that the art of photography is a dynamic process of giving form to ideas and of explaining man to man. It was conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life—as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world.

We sought and selected photographs, made in all parts of the world, of the gamut of life from birth to death with emphasis on the daily relationships of man to himself, to his family, to the community and to the world we live in—subject matter ranging from babies to philosophers, from the kindergarten to the university, from primitive peoples to the Councils of the United Nations. Photographs of lovers and marriage and child-bearing, of the family unit with its joys, trials and tribulations, its deep-rooted devotions and its antagonisms. Photographs of the home in all its warmth and magnificence, its heartaches and exaltations. Photographs of the individual and the family unit in its re-
actions to the beginnings of life and continuing on through death and burial. Photographs concerned with man in relation to his environment, to the beauty and richness of the earth he has inherited and what he has done with this inheritance, the good and the great things, the stupid and the destructive things.

Photographs concerned with the religious rather than religions. With basic human consciousness rather than social consciousness. Photographs concerned with man’s dreams and aspirations and photographs of the flaming creative forces of love and truth and the corrosive evil inherent in the lie.

For almost three years we have been searching for these images. Over two million photographs from every corner of the earth have come to us—from individuals, collections, and files. We screened them until we had ten thousand. Then came the almost unbearable task of reducing these to 503 photographs from 68 countries. The photographers who took them—273 men and women—are amateurs and professionals, famed and unknown.

All of this could not have been accomplished without the dedicated efforts of my assistant, Wayne Miller, and the tireless devotion of our staff.

The Family of Man has been created in a passionate spirit of devoted love and faith in man.
... and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes
and then he asked me would I yes ...
and first I put my arms around him yes
and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes
and his heart was going like mad
and yes I said yes I will Yes.

James Joyce
We shall be one person  
Pueblo Indian
The universe resounds with the joyful cry I am.

Scriabin
And shall not loveliness be loved forever?  
Euripides
Bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh . . .  

Genesis 2:23
She is a tree of life to them . . .

Proverbs 3:18
The little ones leaped, and shouted, and laugh’d

And all the hills echoed . . .

William Blake
... deep inside,
in that silent place
where a child's fears crouch...

Lillian Smith
When I am a man, then I shall be a hunter

When I am a man, then I shall be a harpooner

When I am a man, then I shall be a canoe-builder

When I am a man, then I shall be a carpenter

When I am a man, then I shall be an artisan

Oh father! ya ha ha ha

Kwakiutl Indian
Bob Jokobsen, Los Angeles Times

Diane and Allan Arbus, Vogue

Martha Kitchen
With all beings and all things we shall be as relatives

Sioux Indian
Before me peaceful,
Behind me peaceful,
Under me peaceful,
Over me peaceful,
All around me peaceful . . .

Navajo Indian
The land is a mother that never dies

Maori
Italy. Dmitri Kessel Life

China. Dmitri Kessel Life

Ireland. G. H. Metcalf Black Star

U.S.A. Dorothea Lange
U.S.A. Todd Webb  Standard Oil of New Jersey

U.S.A. Margaret Bourke-White  Life

Pakistan. Abdul Razaq Mehta

U.S.A. Charles Ratkin  PFI, Republic Steel

U.S.A. Robert Horton  Scoot
If I did not work, these worlds would perish . . .

Bhagavad-Gita
Bless thee in all the work of thy hand which thou doest.

Deuteronomy 14:29
This is the fire that will help the generations to come if they use it in a sacred manner. But if they do not use it well, the fire will have the power to do them great harm.

Sioux Indian

Nuclear weapons and atomic electric power are symbolic of the atomic age:
On one side, frustration and world destruction:
on the other, creativity and a common ground for peace and cooperation.

U.S. Atomic Energy Commission
French Equatorial Africa. George Rodger Magnum
Eat Bread and Salt and Speak the Truth.

Russian Proverb
Roumania, Werner Bischof  Magnum

U.S.S.R., Kaloksky  Moscow Journalists Club

Peru, John Collier  Standard Oil of New Jersey

Germany, Erich Andres

U.S.A, Jerry Cooke  Life

France, Vero Vee

U.S.A, Louis Faurer  Life

Switzerland, Ernst Brunner  Du Magaz

... Clasp the hands and know
he thoughts of men in other lands . . .

John Masefield
Sing, sweetness, to the last palpitation of the evening and the breeze

St.-John Perse
Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul.

Plato
The hills and the sea and the earth dance.
The world of man dances in laughter and tears.  

Kabir
And the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.  

Exodus 32:6
But such is the irresistible nature of truth,
that all it asks, and all it wants, is the liberty of appearing.

Thomas Paine
... the wise man looks into space,

and does not regard the small as too little, nor the great as too big;

for he knows that there is no limit to dimensions.

Lao-tse
Every man beareth the whole stamp of the human condition.  

Montaigne
As the generation of leaves,
so is that of men.

Homer
Sweden. Karl W. Gullers

Flow, flow, flow, the current of life is ever onward . . . Kobodaishi

Spain. Robert Frank
U.S.A. Randal Partridge

Germany. Mildred Grossman
... I am alone with the beating of my heart ...  

Lui Chi
For Mercy has a human heart,

Pity a human face . . . .

William Blake
What region of the earth is not full of our calamities?  

Virgil
... Nothing is real to us but hunger. Kakuzo Okakura
Behold, this dreamer cometh  

Genesis 37:19
To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting
itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty . . .  Albert Einstein
... I still believe that people are
really good at heart.

Anne Frank, "Diary" (14 years old)
You are the young wonder-tree plant, grown out of ruins.  

Baronga—African Folk Tale
... Humanity is outraged in me and with me.

We must not dissimulate nor try to forget this
indignation which is one of the most passionate forms of love.

George Sand
... the mind is restless, turbulent, strong and unyielding ... as difficult to subdue as the wind.  

Bhagavad-Gita
Who is on my side? Who?

II. Kings 9:32

Who is on my side? Who?
Fill the seats of justice

With good men, not so absolute in goodness

As to forget what human frailty is.

Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd
I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society
but the people themselves...

Thomas Jefferson
Behold this and always love it! It is very sacred,
and you must treat it as such . . .

Sioux Indian
... the best authorities are unanimous in saying that a war with hydrogen bombs is quite likely to put an end to the human race. 
... there will be universal death—sudden only for a fortunate minority, but for the majority a slow torture of disease and disintegration ... 

Bertrand Russell
Who is the slayer, who the victim? Speak.

Sophocles
We two form a multitude.

We two form a multitude.

We two form a multitude.

We two form a multitude.
We two form a multitude.

We two form a multitude.

We two form a multitude.
We, the peoples of United Nations
Determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small . . .

Charter of the United Nations
O wonderful,
wonderful,
and most wonderful wonderful!
and yet again wonderful . . .

William Shakespeare
A world to be born under your footsteps . . .

St.-John Perse