

## **Chapter Four: Innocent Eyes and Pristine Cultures**

This book is about two very specific sets of photographs in large part. one set is largely a collection of stills and the other although some stills are part of the story is largely a movie. But each chapter so far has reminded the reader that perception is conditioned by those doing the perceiving and also tends to have some kind of real effect upon those people and patterns which are perceived. This chapter goes beyond the previous chapters in the depth and seeking to understand what the documentarians employed by Standard Oil were doing. Still however there will not be a great deal of technical sophistication and detail in this part of the study. The aspect of sound as it was operating at the time and specifically in the case of Louisiana Story and the brief mention of other technical aspects of the photographic or cinematic process in only a handful of cases will be worked into study however partially. This does bend some of the conventions of what a history text about South Louisiana might be expected to be but not in the direction of becoming a manual for professional photographers. I like to believe I know a little something about photography but I am far more interested in photographers as regards this text. Taylor Calder-Marshall titled the most authoritative and seminal biography of Robert Flaherty *The Innocent Eye* and the idea that Flaherty had an innocent point of view and was at his best depicting pristine cultures has been a widely held and broadly supported idea about his work. Thus in title and concept this chapter focuses on Flaherty's work more than on the SONJ stills although not to the exclusion of that project or its images. How Louisiana Story fits into the body of Flaherty's work is a question importance in determining how to evaluate it. Some idea of how it is regarded in the scholarship of documentary film can be gleaned from Ronald S. Magliozzi's biographical essay on Flaherty which appears in the 1998 volume titled *Filming Robert Flaherty's Louisiana Story: The Helen Van Dongen Story*. Magliozzi writes, "Louisiana Story was Flaherty's return to themes of wilderness, exploration and innocence, and to the style of poetic humanism that distinguished his most highly regarded films." The context for the view of Cajun culture which was portrayed in the film also has a context within the documentary film community in the largest sense as it existed then and as it exists now. In the same volume just named, in his essay "Discover and Disclose; Helen Van Dongen and *Louisiana Story*" Richard Barsam discusses Flaherty and reveals how the community of critical and in a sense historical scholars view this body of work by a great American documentarian.

*Flaherty's view of the world was founded not only on a humanistic faith in man but moreover on a romantic neglect of human evil. This tender vision embraces the human not the material continuum of this world. Flaherty agreed with Rousseau that the most "primitive" or least advanced people are the happiest and the least corrupt and that the arts and sciences that comprise what we call civilization corrupt man's native goodness.*

One may note that in this book terms like sexism and ethno-centricity are sometimes used but so are terms like misogyny and bigotry. It is hard to say how ethnocentric Flaherty may have been as a documentarian and a New Englander viewing the world. But I really do think it is

important to remember that he made *Man of Aran* about the extremely rural part of Irish population coping with the extremes of nature. I feel that Flaherty felt as connected to an Irish sense of identity as much as to any other form of identity with which he was born. If that is even remotely true then it does something to prove along with other evidence that he was not a bigot. He knew the family he created in *Louisiana Story* was purely fictional and that his actors were quite different from the people they portrayed. However sometimes he seems to have been a bit seduced by his own fiction, perhaps almost any filmmaker would have been seduced by the beauty of the work.

Lionel Leblanc was a real trapper, could really speak French and really knew the wetlands. J.C. Boudreaux really had a way with a pirogue, with animals and really hooked and pulled in an alligator when asked to do so for the film. Evelyn Bienvenue could really cook and keep house in a remote cabin if need be. Choosing these people and not professional actors was part of Flaherty's integrity. In a later chapter we will see Cajun character and mainstream American perception of that character in more detail. However, perhaps here it is fair to ask what the American audience could be expected to accept about anyone like the Cajun trappers. One might argue that cowboys and other groups were portrayed with no greater authenticity and that although almost all of the cowboy films were both openly fictional and set in the past nonetheless the American people were absorbing an image of the cowboy that really people had to live with and which was in various ways misleading. An increasingly urban society may have needed to believe that this in extreme wilderness or rural environments were more "other" than they actually were. Many American communities were still developing a more urban and suburban identity and the a kind of insecurity about this new life in an industrial superpower of large and midsize cities created a need to show that people living and working in the vast wildernesses of this country were not just Americans who had some differences with their countrymen and countrywomen. The people had to be a bit more exotic. I believe the Cajun trappers were a bit exotic. I also believe that Flaherty did not attempt and did not achieve an academic ethnological film capturing their way of life. He created a work of art which preserved some real visual and other information. Flaherty was certainly not unique in bringing a great number of parameters and predispositions to his efforts to portray a subject. Rather he was normal in that regard.

The idea of making pictures for a living predates the invention of the photographic process. Artists who made pictures for a living were attracted to the institutions and cultural processes which made it possible for them to earn a living and also to satisfy the inner needs and aspirations which led them to become artists in the first place. Gaines Foster, previously cited for his analysis of the transformed cultural patterns of the former Confederacy in the twentieth century as described in the book *Moral Reconstruction* has also written of a set of artistic and perceptual institutions in his book *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865 to 1913*. The book is almost as much about monuments and statuary as this book is about photographic and filmic representations. It is almost as much -- not quite as much. The processes that produced those images were different but they had an important role to play in shaping the larger society of the emerging New South -- those

Confederate soldiers made of stone, plaster, poetic verse or metal which were created by Southern communities or veterans organizations to deal with the aftermath of the war and move on are treated as tangible products and given his address of the famous quote from H.L. Menken describing the South as the "Sahara of the Bozart", it would seem that the fact of these tangible objects as art object and visual crafts is significant to the overall vision of the New South as Foster conceives it. What is more or less an industry of producing images is supported by a set of cultural condition worth understanding and has cultural effects worth understanding.

The American Civil War produced a kind of industry in representational art in a number of periods and on both sides. William Styple created a memorable book in *Generals in Bronze: Interviewing the Commanders of the Civil War* an edition of the interviews conducted by James Kelly with Union generals for the bronzes he prepared commemorating their heroic struggle for the Northern Society that wished to preserve a quality record of their great triumph over the Rebellion. In that book, where the text is largely the work of a visual artist, the result is still a book in which there is an endless and insoluble tension between whether the real interest is in the images commissioned and effected or the general officers of the Union Army and the Grand Army of the Republic who are being depicted. Of course the photography of the Civil War is one of its interesting features because combat and marital photography on a grand scale were relatively recent parts of the vast pattern of human struggle of war. Matthew Brady certainly made himself into a bit of a legend and a fixture in the studies of historians by doing his work to capture the great faces involved in creating and shaping that great conflict. His work distinguishes itself and tends to rise above whatever field of work he finds himself in but yet he studied in the National Academy and photographed the Civil War. Neither the Civil War nor the Academy were individual pursuits or inventions of his mind. Brady was part of a kind of professional community and involved in an enterprise that was bound to employ a good number of practitioners representational arts and crafts. He simply made sure that significant American photography was a real part of what went on. Perhaps others would have done so in his place and perhaps not. But Brady defined himself, his work and his subject in a context defined for him by his times and his place in those times.

Indiana University Art Museum discusses one of these historical groups of pictures produced in a context which defines them. to fully and richly understand these images one must understand the *milieu* which produced them.

*The classical itinerary of the Grand Tour was a phenomenon of eighteenth-century Enlightenment humanism. A journey to Italy to view the remains of antiquity was considered an essential element of an upper-class education, and an extended visit to Rome was the Grand Tourist's primary objective. Many tourists and artists spent at least*

*several months in Rome, often continuing south to Naples, a city renowned both for its beauty and for its proximity to Mount Vesuvius and the archaeological sites of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Paestum.*

*Eighteenth-century Rome hosted a sizeable international community of artists (including Germans, Danes, and Swiss). Many settled there permanently, while others came to study, either independently or at schools such as the French Academy in Rome. After their exposure to Rome's classical architecture, some of the academy's students became important figures in the neoclassical movement in revolutionary France. Some artists traveled to Italy in the company of British aristocrats, who employed them to record the famous sites they visited. Many Italian artists also catered to foreign tourists. Pompeo Batoni grew wealthy painting portraits of British aristocrats and copies of Old Master paintings, commissioned as souvenirs by travelers. A demand for views of famous panoramas encouraged the growth of veduta painting, a genre focusing on topographical or bird's-eye views of cities (exemplified by Canaletto's views of Venice).*

The list of such contexts for artists to gather and create works is not an endless and infinite series. In fact, the contrary is true. There is a limited number of venues where many or a good number of artists can gather to portray anything and make a living. At any given time there are few opportunities to portray things that matter in interesting ways and make a living doing so. Stryker and Flaherty both stand above the landscape of such things. Providing employment to the truly gifted and exceptional for many years is really an impressive achievement. Let there be no doubt as to this writer's view of the work. I question why these people pointed the cameras in one direction and not another in social and cultural terms but they knew their craft, their business and their way of life very well. They were not merely competent. A significant number of them were geniuses in the practice of these crafts and arts tied to light and lenses,

The pictures and the film funded by Standard Oil tell a story and one important question is whether it is to any degree the story they came to tell is a true story. Whether the story they did tell was in any way a true story. My undergraduate studies were heavy in literature and I have a high regard for the truth of fiction itself. But fiction is not the same kind of truth as sportswriting for example which I have sometimes done for a living. This study takes a look at the degree to which this group of skilled observers and communicators did communicate fact and create historical documents or sources. We have already examined that question a bit from the point of view of the subjects themselves, the question perhaps is not so simple in resolution as some might assume that it would be. However, all though not directly exhausting the subject or even doing it justice the study has made clear the evidence sufficient to show that the Cajuns were not a pristine culture. The Cajuns were not pristine in their contact with the New England environment. They had fought with New England Yankees in every war since the Civil War and against them in the Civil War. They had played a unique if debatable role in the War of 1812 and the American Revolution. None of these qualities were true of Flaherty's Samoans, Inuit clans or people of the Irish outer islands. Although of course with the rural Irish there are greater similarities. These are Flaherty's connections of course. The people of the SONJ project coming together mostly from the FSA experience are more oriented to see the Cajuns as rural

Americans and that is generally these sense one gets in the difference between the two groups of images. The SONJ pictures had they formed a movie would have captured more of the Acadian experience of moving into the mainstream.

But the people being photographed had an even older relationship with New England than the Revolutionary era of course. Pierre Maisonnat had been a scourge of New England shipping long ago. One might wonder to what degree the struggle between Acadians and Yankees continued in yet another century in the propaganda value of selection of decidedly backwards subjects to shoot compared to the most forward thinking or looking subjects. Lafayette, Louisiana was not Boston no matter what but neither was it the La Tour cabin. Perhaps some of the people they shot may have descended from Maisonnat or some other Acadian privateer under the French standard. Less than perfect relations between the regions and peoples has a bit of precedent over quite a bit of time, Pierre Maisonnat *dit Baptiste* was born in Bergerac, France in 1663 in the larger region of Western France which besides Bergerac included La Rochelle and Poitiers from which most Acadian colonists came. Flaherty and Webb had not grown up hating Maisonnat but that is not the only way a tradition of hostility can find its way into subsequent traditions. So whether it seems fair or not this study will not presume goodwill was an essential part of whatever perspective distinguished these documentarians. The relationship between New Englanders and Acadians was not all hostile and negative. One chapter in Brasseaux's *Founding of the New Acadia* is devoted to tracking the positive aspects of the relations between what amounted to neighboring communities. Those good relations between wars included trade, personal friendship and varied forms of what amounted to political and diplomatic cooperation. But the point of all this is that in no way whatsoever was this a pristine culture in the sense that Flaherty was recording either an aboriginal culture which had been in this place since before the start of the historical record nor was this in any way a culture which had never been observed by the people who most defined the basic culture of New York and the North Eastern Seaboard of the United States. There is a third way in which the Cajuns might be a pristine culture for Flaherty. They could be pristine in the way that they faced the natural environment without the support of a larger outside society before the coming of the oil industry. In the chapters so far it has been shown that the most rural Cajuns participated in a cash economy, were connected to many institutions in towns and communities and in many other ways were not pristine. But it is also true that while a trapper might buy all his traps he respected the trapper who could make his own if he needed to and maybe ran one or two handmade traps. The trapper's wife might buy most of her vegetables but still respected the trapper's wife who had a garden, chickens, ducks, turtles and a few fruit trees within the distance a woman could walk carrying a baby. That was still an admired accomplishment. The average trapper might not live a pristine lifestyle at all in this last since but perhaps had rags and patches of pure subsistence capabilities and a view that those trappers would prosper most who made their money in the larger market and kept most of it by producing a great deal themselves when no trapping would or could occur. The SONJ photographers certainly captured many images of these varied kinds of economic activities near the home which were often either directly in support of the man's work far from home or were undertaken by women. In addition to subsistence, women could generate cash income from excess eggs, chickens and produce.

This could be even more important to farmers and cattlemen than to trappers although the farmers and trappers usually had more money and wealth. The farmers and cattlemen only got paid a few times each year in many cases and these small sales provided cash flow to the families which could make a large difference in the survival of the farm or ranch. So generally, there was no pristine culture to record by any real meaning of the word.

There are of course other significant influences in the environment which one cannot ignore. Not the least of those is the 1936 novel by Margaret Mitchell and the 1939 film based on that novel *Gone With the Wind* was very much in the air. Scarlett O'Hara was sweeping through Abbeville in a big way when Dudley Leblanc elevated the image of Therese of Lisieux not all that far away from the towns movie screens. The two women are of course very different. Some have said and written that Margaret Mitchell's Scarlett was very much based on the novelist herself. Dudley Leblanc was certainly selecting a different kind of Catholic woman to present to this little Southern town. *Gone With the Wind* provides a view of things in the aftermath of the Civil War which was more palatable to New England sensibilities than most of the visions of the conflict which were prevalent in Acadiana. The differences between Georgia's hill country and Acadiana were real differences and so Mitchell's vision does not account for everything that differs between the two narratives of the War Between the States that had not so very long who dropped out of living memory. a child born in 1865 was 80 years old in 1945 and had no memories even of that year. Of course there were a few survivors here and there who could remember something. But the war had mostly passed from the subject of childhood recollections to the subject of records and the history, fiction and drama based on those records.

Georgia after all was one of the thirteen colonies and had an undeniable link to New England in positive terms that went back to the very start of its colonial history. The great adventure of the Revolution would be clearly a joint venture by Georgia, Massachusetts, New York and most of the rest of the American East Coast had a direct connection to that experience of a kind absent elsewhere in the country. Here there are layers of alienation between New York and the Cajuns that did not exist between New York and Atlanta.

One may wonder what Hollywood and Atlanta really have to do with New York, Vermont and Acadiana. Moviemakers are and were a community as well and the connections across the literary and photographic world were extensive. An excellent look at a small part of that set of connections appears in the fascinating book *Some Time in the Sun: The Hollywood Years of F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Nathanael West, Aldous Huxley and James Agee* by Tom Dardis. This is not the time and place to delve thoroughly into the Dardis's book. However anyone with a serious interest in the South should note the name Faulkner. Anyone with a serious interest in connections between New England and the South should note the name Fitzgerald and anyone interested in the documentary sensibility behind the SONJ works should note the name James Agee. People coming into the South to do this work could not get around

and utterly ignore *Gone With the Wind*. *Gone With the Wind* offers a very definite set of interpretations of the Southern experience as it was before and after the Civil War and as it continued to be in the 1930s. One of the most important trends in the sociology of the novel is that people transition from a plantation and slavery based economy to one based on small forms of trade, craftsmanship and entrepreneurship. The Standard Oil interest in showing a transition to a new economy is also seen by Flaherty as a transition to a commercial model of economic prosperity. However, trappers had been working without slaves in fairly large numbers with their own hands to produce goods with a cash value and negotiating leases and land rights associated with their industry since before the Civil War and at all times since. The La Tour family that could have an innocent naivete about leases or about using money was simply an impossibility.

Now in this chapter the questions are asked with more interest in what the documentarians were about. What were the predispositions, conditions, propensities and values of the documentary community more or less based in New York City. In other words, the attention of this study shifts in this chapter to the pictures both still and moving in and of themselves and asks what are they?

To return to the earlier references they are not Grand Tour paintings, Kelly bronzes, the memorials of the New South nor the photographs of Mathew Brady. It will also help to discuss some other things which they clearly are not ever going to become. Neither *Louisiana Story* nor the SONJ photographs replicate the life experience of the Acadian or "Cajun" people in any highly respectable form of ethnological craft which conforms to what is anthropologically described or idealized and yet certainly worse work has been done less honestly with less anthropological value and has gotten at least temporary credence at home in the more serious and professional academic venues where Webb, Flaherty and Van Dongen spent very little time. What is true of anthropology is true of history. These works or not the work of archivists, preservationists or oral historians that are tuned to the best ideal of the academic departments and committed to their standards. Much of their work is not done in a spirit of fine professionalism or even in any historically accurate way by those standards. On the other hand most scholars would have to admit on seeing the work that the best of it is more useful than the worst work that has ever found its way through more academically managed channels. So what can be said of Flaherty's vision and method in particular?

John Grierson, saw Flaherty's work as flawed because it failed to confront social ills and explore the conflict man and man. Nonetheless, Grierson's critique of Flaherty's work assumes more cultural research than evidence suggests. Flaherty wrote the basis of the screenplay used in *Louisiana Story* without really having done any research one can find and it is called *The Christmas Tree*. However his process was to improve upon these things over time. Once on sight he produced a screenplay that is better in almost every sense one can imagine. Richard Leacock remembered working with Flaherty and his tripod based filming when he had been used to hand held work. The purity and detail of the shots was strikingly beautiful to him. In a sense the tripod is a metaphor for Flaherty's work. His weakness might be in what he chose not

to shoot. His strength however was in his capacity to keep focussed and and let the truth of what he did film emerge with clarity.

The documentary photographs appearing in this section of the study constitute the latter of the two Stryker collections and serve as the means to study Acadian life and analyze assimilation. Perhaps the most sensitive treatment of Louisiana's image in the SONJ photographs appears in Frank de Caro's essay "A Pretty Good Picture of Louisiana: The Great Documentary Projects," almost all studies of Stryker's work have emphasized his work directing the Historic Division of the Farm Security Administration during Roosevelt's New Deal. De Caro's analysis makes much of SONJ's propaganda agenda. He does not discuss the correspondence or photographs in general which might argue for other general interpretations of the photographs. Generally, however de Caro's treatment is detailed and balanced. De Caro writes of his own view of how the Standard Oil project both worked as part of Standard Oil and part of the documentary tradition:

*"In their pictures, there is abundant evidence of Standard Oil's presence. An Esso sign appears discreetly along picturesque Bayou Lafourche (fig. 74); another sign for Essomarine shares almost equal attention with a shrimpboat in Morgan City....But they took pictures of many other things as well, and what has been said of the project as a whole is certainly true of Louisiana: through his photographers Stryker engaged in "the building of a photographic record of America on the homefront, the day-by-day existence lived by ordinary Americans.*

*Like the FSA photographers, those of the Standard Oil project were in a position to observe and record traditional folk cultures.....They covered a lot of territory with a mandate to shoot the human actions and creations that interested them.... In the Project's Louisiana pictures, traditional folklife is certainly an important element."*

I think this passage illustrate in a kind of indirect way the difference between the movie and the still collection. Both have their biases and limit and both have bits of genius but the still are more like journalistic reportage. Flaherty's film is in my view a kind of fine art made as a corporate commercial in a manner informed largely by ethnology. That may be quite a mouthful as a description but I believe it is better to come to a complicated truth than to a simple lie. ethnological, artistic and commercial elements all remain vital components of the total work which is *Louisiana Story*.

As we stated in chapter one of this text this set of documentaries has its own place in and helps to preserve a specific moment in history, it is something that happened in a particular place and it is a very American phenomenon. Helen Van Dongen became an American citizen while filming *Louisiana Story* but the American quality of it all goes far beyond that. From the point of view of the learned communities of French Louisiana and some other regions it often seems that the United States **lacks** more and more and **retains** less and less any conscious and articulate tradition of recording or historical understanding of itself and its destiny within which a

community of Euro-Americans who occupied their region before the establishment of Anglo-Americans in the area really can be understood. America has remarkably often redefined itself and the clear truth in the eyes of such people has often seemed to be the casualty. I have read and will not cite where a number of scholars who are eager to show that the Roosevelts were not at all Dutch, that even the Scots Irish were more or less English and that key Californios had forgotten their heritage. This seems to be a kind of absolute nonsense that America has prized and held close to itself along with its ever evolving its self perceptions. There is always less space and time for those narratives. In addition to that there is a political element to the whole transition which relies on real qualities of the founding of the Republic which people as different as Prohibitionists, Civil Rights workers and many other have found ways to capitalize upon. the fact is that this country is about ideas more than communities in some ways. This country has appeared in the writing of many of its best leader and thinkers as a designed and culturally neutral political union of free men. Others have viewed it as an extension and perfection of the new Promised Land receiving its way of life from Providence. If that vision is at all true then the story was written in many ways be a fairly diverse set of real communities largely of white people who had to relate to one another in very specific ways often and on a large scale. However somehow the telling of that story creates a sort of central union of the people here around a single simple myth in a way which for many people now more on the periphery clearly never existed.

The 1930s may have been the first time that a large scale effort was made by artists, thinkers and political leaders to discover the uniquely American culture often called the American Way of Life. Those years of the Depression and of the New Deal were also the years when the American "Documentary" exploded from obscurity to what may have been its zenith. The documentaries made possible a more intense debate and dialogue about the relationship between culture and America. That dialogues continues as we consider the broad and rich community of American documentary filmmakers at that time.

This documentary impulse played a central role in the formation of the body of sources discussed in the both in the prior and in the subsequent pages of this thesis. It was in the classic documentary period of the 1930's that Roy Stryker became involved in the New Deal effort to photograph rural life in America. His work with Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Agency known as the Farmer's Security Administration is only discussed briefly in this thesis but is central to the dissertation of which this thesis is an adapted section. During the thirties Stryker became famous for directing photographers who took tens of thousands of photographs of rural America. On the basis of that achievement he was hired by Standard Oil in the forties to capture and show, in a similarly enormous photographic collection, the impact of the oil industry on the fabric of American life.

Besides the Roy Stryker matrix for his work Flaherty has another affinity that needs to be understood in order to achieve any really sophisticated understanding of his film. That affinity is really not so easily laid bare and understood as the documentary film context. Flaherty had a strong affinity for silent film. Understanding what silent film was and how it maintained a hold on

Flaherty is a challenge that cannot be left unmet if the film is to be understood in its own historical context , within the history of film.

One factor in understanding how Flaherty's work has been perceived is that the documentarians were predominantly Leftists. Some were what are called liberal Democrats, some were socialists and some were Communists at least at some point in their lives. Although they were not leaders in the Workers Film and Photo League sponsored by the Comintern (or Communist International) the documentarians lived and worked in the same 1930s New York. Work outside of book length publication and first rate journals has been presented at the University of California at Berkeley which clearly show that while the New Deal films, international Communist films and American Leftist films can be understood as different as can Grierson's Labour Government Sponsored British films there is a kind of community or milieu that embraces all of these filmmakers and does not include many other people or institutions. In more reductionist terms one can see the totality of this filmmaking documentary community in New York as a whole and as one thing. in the midst of all that and active in it is Flaherty. Flaherty does not do the politics of Lorentz's New Deal films, does not see the principal characters as victims as Grierson does and is not paid by international Communist institutions. The natural question to ask is whether Flaherty was an authentic American leftist. Was Flaherty a Leftist?

Flaherty worked with Pare Lorentz and the New Deal on *The Land*, he worked with Grierson and the British Left on *Industrial Britain*. However he also worked with Standard Oil, Paramount and lots of private enterprise. I do not think his views fit into the modern left very well. He is in my view closer to my own political views which are a nuanced form of the far right. Family, honor, a kind of Darwinist triumph, individual violence for the common good, tradition and a husbandry of resources are more in line with his values. He found it easier to admire the far Left than the laziest and least responsible articulations of the American right in many cases. One of my happiest times was spent as a certified Foreign Expert in the People's Republic of China in part 2004 and part of 2005. Flaherty I believe found attractive in the Left a sense of responsibility, that one must reason through to the results and outcomes of actions and not merely try one's best and have a blind faith in the market. He also was put off by the kinds of fascism which are intrinsically genocidal or focussed on hate. Flaherty and I are quite distinct and I am sure I am not projecting myself on him but rather am able to relate to his point of view in some ways.

Flaherty made his name and a path to a sufficient fortune with his film *Nanook of the North* in 1921. This is really a silent film with titles on screen that provide the needed words. It has the advantage that it can be exhibited with titles in different languages and can allow the universal aspect of images and human struggle in nature to reach directly to the viewer. This does not have to be a Leftist panacea. One could argue that D.W. Griffith's classic film *Intolerance* is libertarian and his film the *Birth of A Nation* is a Rightist piece. But the worldwide struggle of the modern Left saw a beautiful opportunity in silent film for a universal language accessible to the masses. One of the greatest masters of silent film was a true Leftist -- Charlie Chaplin. In recent years the film *The Artist* won both acclaim and commercial success and showed that at least

one silent film could make a mark in the age that had never known the medium. It also had a special tug at hearts in French Louisiana because the paucity of French cultural imports into the United States is very notable and this film was a French masterpiece that raised its head over the vast and endless wave of British communications.

He was committed to this medium and the way he let go if is indicative of what the medium meant in social terms. Chaplin was of course a wealthy fixture of a capitalist industry as well as a Leftist and so his story is not entirely uncomplicated either. But as a man who had made such a vast fortune he could afford to fight a final battle for a great and greatly loved work the medium to which he owed so much when others had lost that chance forever to do more than a few feeble attempt at recalling lost glories of silent film.

As silent film was clearly fading into the darkness under the sonorous and brilliant onslaught of the talkies into the movie theaters *City Lights* remains one of the greatest anomalies in film history. A blockbuster hit in a medium (silent film) that was plainly dead. Historians, like the rest of the human race, both enjoy exploring anomalies and hold them in a nearly superstitious awe. There is always the danger that the anomaly may destroy the entire basis of the paradigm by which the historian has explained a series of developments. *City Lights*, at first glance might seem to indicate that the demand for sound over silent films did not have nearly the depth nor the inevitability which seems evident from so much evidence otherwise. *City Lights* could scarcely have achieved greater success artistically or commercially despite its appearance in 1931 when the fast paced sound revolution had already swept the industry and created dozens of films, including *The Jazz Singer*, *Public Enemy*, *The Blue Angel* and many less important films. To begin to understand this silent film is to understand the man who made it and the time in which it was made.

One might make a strong argument that, while Griffith and Porter and others made very powerful and original contributions to silent film, Chaplin made the finest silent films in American history. Whether or not they were the best, the films certainly carried true silence to outer limits. By that I mean that he did not limit the ways in which silent film could be used he attacked the most impregnable stronghold of spoken theater and later talkies. The way in which he did this is that as a director Chaplin filmed groups of people conversing naturalistically in his entirely silent medium. However as actor and creator of the Tramp he was invested in a character who was a true mime. Chaplin's medium could not be adapted to sound without losing something of its most essential nature. The mime is silent, the mime is everyman and the mime is physical not spoken comedy. The Tramp is a great mime of the American silent era. For Chaplin the coming of sound had to be especially disturbing. The contention i offer here is that *City Lights* addresses, along with the theme of the Great Depression Chaplin's reaction to the coming of sound to film. The Leftist (among other identities he holds) still has the obligation to address the political and economic crisis but the Leftist is joined with the rest of him in mourning the passing of the language that all the suffering masses of the world can understand together.

The difference between the nineteen twenties and the nineteen thirties for Americans includes the difference between a decade of prosperity ending in disgrace and a decade of grinding poverty gradually ameliorated by the New Deal and preparations for a terrible war. Warren Susman, perhaps better qualified than all but a handful of scholars to describe the spirit of the twenties in American culture, wrote: "By 1922 an exceptional number of Americans came to believe in a series of changes in the structure of their world.... they found themselves developing new techniques both for amassing still more knowledge and even achieving a fuller experience (Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, 106)."

Silent film was an important technique for achieving new forms of communication and experience and the international nature of that communication was always an obvious quality of the movies before sound and it was much discussed. To the degree that the 1948 film *Louisiana Story* touched and drew from the old inner sources that had fueled Nanook Flaherty had to be reminded of the glory days of silent film. In those glory days of silent film, the films made by Flaherty and Chaplin in America or as American productions made in Canada or elsewhere to differing degrees were in what aspired to be a really world wide film community. Chaplin and Flaherty both saw that their work joined in a fairly high level of competition and dialog based on serious artistic endeavor which allowed their films to be compared equally and fairly with the films of Eisenstein, to see Hollywood compared on equal grounds with the brilliant work which had built and sustained the Lumiere studios in France since their inception in 1895. Even as artists it was heady stuff to believe one was working in a truly universal medium in which the best human communicators could compete as equals with anyone or at least that American geniuses could compete evenly with European pioneers of film. This rising cosmopolitan nature of film was suppressed by what Sklar calls the "counter-revolution of sound which would erect a capital, language and patent barrier around American film beginning in 1928. Remarkably, this lessening and suppression of an international marketplace for images was accompanied by a dissolution of the full and free economic intercourse of nations. The Great Depression is as much a phenomenon of greatly lessened international exchange as the new sound movie industry".

It seems that Chaplin knew too that there was an escapism in the new sound extravaganzas that could mock the suffering of the poor and struggling in which the intimate human portrayals he loved in silent film did not. *Louisiana Story* made much later than *City* maintains the intimate feel Chaplin celebrates in that last hurrah. Richard Leacock was making a scientific technical comment when he said later that *Louisiana Story* was more of a silent film than otherwise. However in an artistic and philosophical sense that same reality exists. In *City Lights* which was a silent film with a sound track he wished to contrast his simple scenes of simple people doing good with the grand spectacles attempted after the *Jazz Singer*. He seemed to be saying that in an age when so many were isolated, depressed and in need the poetry of silent film was better able to meet their needs than the circus of the talkies. His side rallying under the banner of silence lost the war for film and Flaherty was to make his living in talkies and in that sense he crossed over to what could have been the enemy. Yet the film *City Lights* itself won the battle

for audiences and acclaim and was a smashing success. This success caused many to remember it as the most critically oriented of Chaplin's films and one which had the most specific message besides *The Great Dictator*. People like Flaherty who made films which had to do more than merely make money and entertain were more likely to remember the message of *City Lights* for the rest of their careers. There was no great subtlety to blindness of the girl beloved by the Tramp. Among other things happening the great mime was in love with an audience that could not see. The filmmaker like Flaherty who demanded that one look hard at his images and saw each frame as a kind of painting could understand the fear of an audience that could no longer be counted on to look hard as they waited for sound to inform them. The optimistic and subversive subtlety of the Chaplin message is essentially to prove that silent film could amuse and entertain the fractured world of the thirties while also reaching the world and carrying a shaft of truth.

Flaherty's message in *Louisiana Story* is provided by his instructions from Roy Stryker and he will make a film that shows oil bringing prosperity but he was likely to remember a lot of films made during the great economic crisis of the Depression. He faced new challenges with microphones and the dedicated editing of Van Dongen. She edited both pictures and sound the technology did not sync them and few clips really have the sound that was recorded with images with which the sound is played on exhibition. Nor is there an enormous amount of speech. Flaherty must have had occasion to compare making this film with making *Nanook*. He also would have remembered that crisis which marked the end of silent film's dominance. If he remembered that he remembered that one man at a level beyond Flaherty or anyone else could most easily perceive, and was likely to express, a sense of the mysterious not-at-all-causal relationship between sound film and the Depression. That man was the self-made millionaire immigrant and world famous mime of the silent screen -- Charles Chaplin.

In light of this possible connection of seemingly unrelated events *City Lights* takes on a new depth and complexity of meaning. The world is well aware that less trade joins the world together and the collapse of markets means starvation and doom for millions. Chaplin is well aware a medium that enabled the whole world to communicate is dying. For him the connection between the two events is mysterious but real. New Deal sound films will address the Depression but Chaplin's response in *City Lights* is significant as well in the history of film. Americans that read history have traditionally assigned the greatest importance to political and economic events in shaping the past of their country, rather than cultural history. The temperaments drawn to the old drum and trumpet histories have often been reticent to engage with what seems to be the newer and softer cultural histories. Books like Foster's *Ghosts* have been comparatively rare where cultural expression and harder edged military and political history are seen in a very close linkage. Strange as it may seem to us, it clearly seemed the coming of sound film was to seem to Chaplin to be a very significant aspect of the split apart world and increasingly isolated and fractured trading systems which typified the period when *City Lights* was made.

Cultural historian Warren I Susman often repeated the claim that Mickey Mouse was as important to the thirties as F.D.R. and *Steamboat Willie* is a sound film. That should remind

anyone of the powerful contribution of sound to film. Anyone who wishes to should notice that Disney is now very international so good engineering and invention did not destroy the industry. However, the coming of the talkies was both a metaphor for America's new isolation and fixation on itself. This fixation of American film on American audiences and sometimes subjects is surely partly responsible for producing many of the great American documentary projects and perhaps objectively sound films served as one minor agent among many in creating that isolation of Depression Era America within the realm of popular culture.

*City Lights* was Chaplin's greatest response to all the changes between the twenties and the thirties. The film tells the story of a Tramp mistaken for a millionaire by a beautiful blind flower girl. Arouse to compassion and love, the tramp resolves to help her. By saving a drunken man from suicide the Tramp is sporadically and occasionally over time able to access some of the wealth and power of the closed off world of the elite. He uses that world of the rich and its resources to assist the flower girl. Combining his bizarre relationship with the rich man with a career of being beaten up, working as a street sweeper and gambling he is able to first tip, then feed, then rescue from eviction and finally restore sight to the blind flower girl. When the Tramp, who has remained a millionaire in the mind of the girl, meets the prosperous and sighted florist he once helped she acts kindly toward him as a needy Tramp and then later discovers and rejects the same man she had helped when it seems she discovers who her benefactor really is.

*City Lights* is not silent in an absolute sense. Sound technology provides musical accompaniment and certain sound effects for the film's images. The first important title plate in the film states that *City Lights* is "A Comedy Romance in Pantomime" its final word announcing its connection with silents and not "talkies." How different is it really than *Louisiana Story*? It is different surely but perhaps there is something to Leacock's feeling that it is a kind of hybrid because it is shot so far out of a studio with technology that did not dynchronise sound and images.

One of the themes Chaplin takes care to establish from the outset is that the Tramp lies outside the officially approved course and direction of life in the "city." An early scene develops this scene very extensively within the first minutes of the film. In the shot establishing the scene a large crowd, complete with officers of the law, gathers around the base of a stage on which speakers and dignitaries are gathered before the large veiled monument to "peace and prosperity." One thing that Flaherty does in the 1948 film is to show that the countryside people have a viable way of life outside the mainstream society represented by Standard Oil's subsidiary.

In *City Lights* a small number of long slow shots moving in on the stages the focus comes to center on the wooden and pompous dignitaries making speeches which are rendered a little ridiculous by the sound track which merely gives the film audience whistle and blue notes. The rather documentary nature of the shots themselves create a comic tension with the sound. The noises and sounds of the drillers and all their machines are not so far from that cacophony. But they are not ridiculous because the failure of the drilling is remedied really by the Boy's magic.

The Boy in Louisiana Story is no less a fictional creation of a character than is the Tramp. According to James Naremore's *Acting in the Cinema*, Chaplin first used the Tramp in the film *Kid's Auto Race* which was a comedy about the Tramp disrupting both a public spectacle and the news crew attempting to film it (Naremore, 12-14). Chaplin's long experience makes this more sophisticated as one holds in mind the anticipated unveiling of the monument, the absurd sounds of the speakers and the serious visual dignity of the ordered crowd and speakers. Both the Tramp and the Boy are observers not bound by the rules of life which constrained the more well established and integrated members of society.

In the start of *City Lights* at an appropriate point in time the ribbon is pulled and the wraps fall from the monument as the martial airs of an anthem fill the sound track. The revelation is of Tramp sleeping indecorously on one of the two laps of the monument. While the Tramp wakes, gets hung up by his pants on the sword of a monument dedicated to peace, uses the monument's face to "accidentally" thumb his nose at the civic ceremony and finally disappears over a fence his powerful critics are helpless. The editing continuously juxtaposes shots of the Tramp with irate police and offended and nonplused public speakers who are bound by convention to stand still for the anthem. The society and its talk is rendered absurd by the end of the first scene in the film. In Louisiana Story the Boy is aware and managing his environment and the oil company breaks in upon it. here too the contrast is not really what the viewer might expect. The more monied part of the world is not necessarily the clearly better world.

The film *City Lights* never again achieves as broad a social focus as it has in that civil ceremony at the start of the film. However the beginning forms the audience perception of the Tramp and his connection to his society. It also shows the effective upstaging of speech by silent comedy in graphic terms. In Louisiana Story it is the pristine quality of nature and the innocence of boyhood which will never again return to the peak achieved in the first scenes.

In *City Lights* the sequences Chaplin uses to build this film develop around certain motifs related to sensory perception. The articulate and literary structure of Chaplin's last great silent film is itself a message about the medium. First, the motif of altered perceptions forms a critical series of turning points in the film. The first is the clever shot which shows the Tramp crossing traffic through a car, buying a flower and then being mistaken for a millionaire when the girl hears a car door slam just after the tramp pays her. This same theme is reiterated in all the shots which show a convivial rich man of expansive gestures who in his drunkenness sees the Tramp as his brother and in cold sobriety of his normal life shuns the Tramp utterly. Finally, the motif is tragically climactic when a girl altered by her ability to see rejects the gentle love of the visually unlovely Tramp. In Louisiana Story the raccoon, the alligator and other animals do not speak and the boy is a speaking person who can and does live well in their world. The speech among people and the noise of the machines is a strong contrast to the quiet but not silent world of the natural swamp.

Another recurrent motif in the film *City Lights* is the mockery of speech. This motif begins with the scene at the dedication of the monument, continues with the contrast between the broken promises of the rich man and the kind deeds of the nearly mute tramp. Words are also made ridiculous at the cocktail parties. Especially where the Tramp swallows a whistle so that whenever he speaks a whistle comes forth which he can not control and which makes the whole event ridiculous. The blow out by the drilling rig and the falling silent leave the sound of the swamp again ascendant. It is not the same as *City Lights* but perhaps there is an affinity there as well.

Lastly a third major motif in *City Lights* that is related to altered perception but is also related to another set of contrasts. Chaplin uses the shift from light to darkness and night to dawn repeatedly in titles, the name of the movie, lighting, and the girl's blindness and recovery. It is in the dark that the Tramp can do amazing things and is seen as valuable and good. In the cold of full light the senses confuse the inner and magical perceptions and he is rendered ordinary. This light and darkness is synecdochal for many reversals. The drunk millionaire behaves better than he does sober. Blind as she is the girl sees the Tramp more clearly than sighted. The critique of judging by the senses is a cry for understanding in the Depression and for fraternity with those who seem shabby. The same motif serves to question the value of aiding another sense to the medium of film -- namely sound. In *Louisiana Story* the Boy uses magic salt to save the oil industry -- really that is strong but not far from what is given us to watch. Here the rational sight of the mind is an impediment to seeing things through to completion. The resolution to the needs of the technological world come from the more silent and natural world ruled over by the Boy.

In *City Lights* one of the techniques which makes this complicated layering of meaning effective rather than confusing is Chaplin's economy of locations. Repeated shots of the rich man's car and house, lit and filmed similarly as with the girl's house, the streets and the young boys who punctuate the scene before Chaplin's first and final encounter with the flower girl are examples of a similar limiting of the number of images. While there is no single place that is the little swamp where *Louisiana Story* occurs. The narrative location is limited and simple. The trapper's cottage, the boatside banks, the swamp at Avery Island in a lush manicured park and the drilling barge site made into a single constrained narrative or cinematic location. Flaherty keeps the focus on that location pretty tight.

All of these connections are loose ones. But they are enough perhaps to show one of the other sets of defining and constraining influences which shaped and defined the making of the film discussed in this study. This is a conclusion of what we have to say about the artistic environment and community which produced these images.

Somehow this real community of people ended up funded by the Oil industry's biggest American player in the heart of Cajun Country. The reasons are not all that mysterious, one of the most important oil production areas during the forties was Acadiana and the section of the Gulf of Mexico adjoining the Acadiana region. Standard Oil sought to set itself up for leadership in

many areas including this one in face of postwar uncertainty. And because of *Louisiana Story* it has worked out that Standard Oil's effort at what may have been documentary propaganda is best known for work done in Acadiana. The photographs taken by Stryker's photographers have received some attention but a better known effort is the film subsidized by Standard Oil at the same time.

The photographs funded by Standard Oil are the most important source of this study and to a very large degree this study is about them and what they can contribute to the study of cultural history. That contribution is tested by including them at the same time in a cultural historical study of the Cajun people. Finally, the photographs are compared and related to the film *Louisiana Story*, the differences between the film and the photographs are very instructive in terms of the ways in which documentary art can function as a source for cultural history.

Scholarly, technical and critical writing about Flaherty and the *Louisiana Story*, has almost entirely come from a perspective other than that of Louisiana history. The big exception is the film *Louisiana Story: The Reverse Angle* that film will find its way into a later chapter at some length. None would argue that Flaherty who produced and directed the film depicting the wetlands oilfields of the 1940s intended to produce an academic history. Yet at the very least, his film forms a small part of the history of the region. It was largely from the study of outsiders' perceptions of assimilation and persistence and especially as it related to what they did and did not wish to shoot that this essay on the *Louisiana Story* emerged as a tentative thesis proposal many years ago. Because the time and place of Flaherty's production was studied from a more general historical perspective, the film has emerged in the context of influences which have not yet received much attention. *Louisiana Story* differs from Flaherty's first film *Nanook of the North* which creatively documented the hunting life of an Eskimo family. The principal character was in fact named Nanook, the places filmed were actually his hunting grounds and the family was actually his family. *Louisiana Story* was not a documentary of a place or a culture in the same way as *Nanook of the North*. Rather, Flaherty's last film was a fine piece of drama and myth in film. But it was a film where real Cajun clothes-makers, pirogue wrights, trappers and animal wranglers among others were employed to do things that Cajuns really did. It employed a real Cajun cast and it was beautifully shot and edited. In fact it may have been harder to sell a film name *Lionel of the manicured Jungle Gardens Park* than one named *Nanook of the North*. there is plenty of opportunity to discuss the ethics and values of the project but it is neither all one thing or all another. That has been written before and will be repeated again.

*Louisiana Story* uses a relatively small Cajun cast and a few Standard Oil people of no great numbers for a modest cast overall and achieves an economy both perceptual and financial. Yet this was not a very cheap film not is it a nature film with just an odd human shiot now and then, Given the small number of words, the audience achieves a surprising rapport with these few characters. Yet each character is a type even more than a person. One little boy, one father, one mother and one driller allows the audience to focus on the impact of the oil industry upon Acadians and their wetlands, and the universal meanings associated with changing times and the dreamlike state of childhood. Like the walrus scene and sequence in *Nanook* involving the

hunt, the alligator scene combined some authentic action with a touch of highly improbable drama.

The topic discussed here clearly demands that all the questions historians are concerned about be answered or the reasons they are not addressed be specified. In general terms this text provides a means of evaluating the historical and cultural accuracy in Flaherty's work, roughly assessing the candor of his relations with his subjects or determining the clarity and sensitivity his filmic portrayal of certain folkways both as functions of the questions arising out of Louisiana history as well as the very different questions arising out of film history. Robert Flaherty, called "father of the documentary" has attracted the close attention of many able writers that has continued in the nearly quarter century that this project was dormant. Few of the writers about his work really know much about the fullness or breadth of his subject matter of this last greatly acclaimed and arguably his most technically accomplished film. In addition there has been in most cases a reluctance to really see the Standard Oil and the Documentarian influences playing out in all their complex tensions. That reluctance has in part arisen from a deference to studies of the Depression era work by some of the same people. That makes it seem to those with a deep connection to this film above all others that his working environment in the 1940s has been little studied and studied with a kind of detachment that has not served the subject well. The little book *Filming Robert Flaherty's Louisiana Story* is a partial exception but it is a little book with very specific things to fit into its pages.

Among the facts often ignored by those who have studied Flaherty's relationship with Standard Oil during the making of his last film is that fact which is at the center of this text. The fact that Standard Oil sponsored another documentary project in Louisiana of which Flaherty was aware. Roy Stryker, who directed photographers Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and Pare Lorentz during his tenure as head of the Farmer's Security Administration Historical Division, hired a group of photographers working in the area where Flaherty worked and there was much overlap between both projects. There is strong evidence, presented below in the discussion of making *Louisiana Story*, that ED and Louise Rosskam wrote a letter in which they presented ideas which led Flaherty to his choice of location and many of the basic elements of plot and theme. The Rosskams letter, written in 1945 also adds to the evidence which shows that both projects operated to some degree as one. Furthermore, evidence suggests that Flaherty relied very little upon the Cajuns he filmed for the content of *Louisiana Story*. When Flaherty did use information from the broader focus in *Acadiana* he may have relied very directly on the SONJ photographers. "I am very glad that you are letting me work with Bob Flaherty." Todd Webb wrote to Roy Emerson Stryker, "...Will all of the things I do over there be cleared through our office? Will he give me any instructions as to what stills he wants or shall I use my own judgement?" It is certainly true that enough data existed within the work done by the Stryker project to have fleshed out the story of the family of a Cajun trapper and the discovery of oil on their land. Another telling piece of evidence that Flaherty derived ideas from Stryker's photographer's rest in the perceptions shared by local people and the photographers that Flaherty lived in isolation from the local people of the area but in close association with the SONJ photographers.

In the summer of 1947 Todd Webb wrote to Roy Stryker again about the Flaherty project "This documentary film business is kind of a farce." The young documentary photographer wrote, "Our experience as alligators when you were down here made me wonder and I have seen plenty since...It is amazing how little they know about the town or the people. They have lived 14 months on their own little island on Main St." In contrast with Webb's description of Flaherty's isolation, he forever describes himself and his colleagues in the SONJ project as stalking alligators and muskrats, interviewing farmers, trappers, fishermen and boatmen. Finally among the more than three hundred photographs filed as "Flaherty Production Shots" there are numerous photographs which mirror or duplicate others in the main body of the collection.

There may be sources which would shed light on Robert Flaherty's production of *Moana* resting in obscurity in Samoa and if it were known that Flaherty's sponsor in that venture was also taking thousands of stills in the same islands, while making the film it might undermine the perception solidified by his earliest biographer that Flaherty creatively stumbled toward his works alone. Film histories, for all their virtues, often show a lack of interest in the places which mesmerized the film artists they describe. John Grierson, speculated as to the relationship between Flaherty and the people and places he filmed. Sources exist in Louisiana which shed light on how Flaherty made *Louisiana Story* specifically. The new evidence refutes the idea that had the most currency when the least study was being done and was the talk of lecture halls and symposia that Flaherty collaborated with his "natural actors" to create a film document of nearly anthropological quality. In the period after the Vietnam War and for some lingering time thereafter the idea of the creative and individualistic artist has become more popular. Again I must remind the reader of some things we discussed early on. Certainly when I began this study almost a quarter of a century before starting its final draft, This documentary impulse played a central role in the formation of the body of sources discussed in the both in the prior and in the subsequent pages of this thesis. It was in the classic documentary period of the 1930's that Roy Stryker became involved in the New Deal effort to photograph rural life in America. His work with Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Agency known as the Farmer's Security Administration is only discussed briefly in this thesis but is central to the dissertation of which this thesis is an adapted section. During the thirties Stryker became famous for directing photographers who took tens of thousands of photographs of rural America. On the basis of that achievement he was hired by Standard Oil in the forties to capture and show, in a similarly enormous photographic collection, the impact of the oil industry on the fabric of American life.

Harkening back to the first chapter of this book it is good to remember that until recently it could be asserted that. Historians generally do not take seriously the claim of the creator of a documentary to produce a historic study of a place. The interaction between subject and artist does shape a film and all recognize the film as a valid source for the history of its makers. Without doubt, documentary filmmakers and photographers of the 1930s and 1940s aimed at work of historical value. Any documentary intends to record a time, a place and a people in an historic set of relationships. Unless such claims have been tried by a careful but creative comparison with other historical sources both the documentary and the subject of the

documentary are not fully understood. When historians use documentaries as valid insights into the events they depict, the study of both the documentary and the subject changes dramatically because the historian must compare it carefully to other views of the subject filmed.

If Flaherty as an artist sought to create a work of his own genius; his relationship with others hold small interest. If he collaborated in a documentary endeavor that functioned as a ferment of projects with shared artistic and technical elements, the meanings and value of his work relates to that community of vision in some way. The few photographs which illustrate this essay may indicate to those familiar with *Louisiana Story* how still images produced by those surrounding Flaherty influenced him. The sense of collaborating to record life in America typified much important work born out of the national trial of the 1930s and 1940s. Evidence that Flaherty was working within a documentary community exists in his choice of Virgil Thompson, the composer who had done the score for many New Deal documentary films. Outwardly focused and loosely organized in complicated ways the small army of Americans involved in documentary sought to define America, politics and the art of documentary but not themselves. The totality of the documentary community escapes essay definition but it clearly existed.

The full roster of Stryker's photographers who worked in Louisiana during Standard Oil years included Esther Buble and Martha McMillan Roberts, who had both begun working for Stryker as darkroom technicians during his F.S.A. years. Others with an F.S.A. past were John Collier, Edward and Louise Roskam and Russell Lee. Only three of the photographers working under Roy Stryker in Louisiana during the Standard Oil years had no past connection with the F.S.A. Two of the three photographers, Todd Webb and Arnold Eagle became closely associated with Flaherty during his work on *Louisiana Story*.

The crew filming *Louisiana Story* was small and the photographers who came over from Stryker's project were well informed about the area before meeting Flaherty. Given the talkative nature of all parties in this crew it strains the belief to think that Flaherty was not influenced by these men. Todd Webb had read about the region and photographed it. Webb's New England background may not have blinded him to Acadiana, but neither did it help him to see it. Perhaps Arnold Eagle's identity as an immigrant who spoke heavily accented English led him to a particular fascination with the real adaptations of the Acadians. As discussed below, Flaherty did not develop *Louisiana Story* from the kind of interaction with those he filmed which many scholars have hypothesized as his chief method of learning about his subject. The alternative hypothesis of this essay is that Flaherty was significantly influenced by the others working for Standard Oil in a documentary capacity. The photographic vision, the biases and the insights of those in the Stryker photographic project had an important role to play in shaping Flaherty's last film.

If Flaherty has left no direct confession that he borrowed from others rather than seeking out his own oral sources then the burden of proof lies on this writer to show such borrowing occurred. In *Louisiana Story* Flaherty's amateur anthropology did not capture as much historical

detail as Eagle's workmanlike observations of the cultural and social distinctiveness of a group of long-time American citizens. Arnold Eagle seemed very interested in the human process of creating things. His work generates much of the little knowledge of the degree of impact Flaherty's crew had on the environment they filmed. Subtler than the varied host which invades a location to produce a commercial film, the crew nonetheless affected the behavior of those it filmed. Flaherty did not often seek out the maximum exposure to the kind of people he sought to film, but rather selected a swamp for some crucial scenes where no trapper ever went. These things alone do not disprove the hypothesis that he relied on his own research in attempting to document the Cajun culture. Below we will discuss the relationship between Flaherty and those around him -- both the Cajuns and the photographers working in the area.

In arguing that *Louisiana Story* bears the stamp of a work made by, and in a real sense for and even because of the strong culture was largely about the little community of documentarians does not mean that they did not document something real. It only means that these artists who were working for Standard Oil but had a well developed concept of what documentary film was and that was modified to suit the needs of Standard Oil. The Cajun contribution to shaping what would appear at the end was the third level of input. It was a known quantity that Standard Oil was hiring but they were not people created in Standard Oil's own image this was a community propensity to seek first of all to communicate with Easter Seaboard American intellectuals, with the workers of the larger cities, with European Leftists and with the larger film community and industry. However, Flaherty really liked to connect with a large American moviegoing audience.

They brought all their predispositions of the period and the result in both projects if taken as a whole collection as regards Acadiana and the Cajuns is largely a second-hand view of the culture it depicts well filtered by all the factors and influences outlined in this chapter. I am not arguing that Flaherty did not create a worthwhile original story, nor that the story has nothing to offer those interested in Cajun life or the natural history of the region. *Louisiana Story* offers us less variety than the photography but does unique service they cannot do in preserving the sounds of Cajun speech and a few techniques of swamping. The point is that the story was made by a man much more removed from his subject than the man who made *Nanook*. Flaherty interpreted individual elements of the local reality within a fictional framework and that this may largely have occurred because he was able to rely on others to forge the ties with his subject which had been so time consuming in his earlier films. Flaherty in fact had a close relationship with another documentary project and yet both had been studied almost as separate and autonomous for half a century when this project first began.

Standard Oil's other major project in Louisiana produced many stills of swamps, trappers, oilmen and pirogues such as Flaherty filmed. The few Stryker pictures which appear here merely represent a much larger body of images, some with more striking visual similarities to the film. The still photographs however provide a much more documentary corpus of images than the film. The Stryker images include several kinds of fishing, trapping, moss gathering, and hunting which made up the way of life in the wetlands. The romantic images are balanced with many prosaic ones.

The treatment and analysis of *Louisiana Story* in this study advances the claim not so much that Flaherty did not learn a great deal from his Cajun natural actors nor that the film is not a "documentary" at all as has sometimes been believed. This is a bit of modest thesis as texts submitted for dissertation defense go. It asserts that one can study both the filmmaking and the subject the film was made about as one studies and writes cultural history. The film is not irrelevant to the Acadiana of the period but is more distant from local realities than Stryker's still photography project. Perhaps exactly one remove more distant, based largely on the information and influence reaching him from the more historical efforts of the Stryker photographers. Less historiographical-critical print has come forth about the "Latour" family than about the Samoans, Inuit and folk of Aran in Flaherty's film. Any historian's study of any work of art, especially of a documentary film, begins with efforts to recreate the past encounter between artist and subject. That remaking of the past constitutes much of an historian's contribution to understanding art. Such restoration of the creative context becomes more crucial if one wishes to evaluate the film as historical document. The Latours were fictional in every way that Hamlet was fictional and a few others besides, there seems certainly to have been a historical character on whom Hamlet was based and no single trapper family inspired this film. But Shakespeare was not taking pictures and recording sound. Sometimes the medium is the message. The film has some standards of integrity that matter and the photographic collection has even more to offer in that regard.