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ABSTRACT

During the Great Depression and World War II, public transportation thrived as an alternative to costly travel by railroads or private cars. This dissertation uses depictions of mass transit as points of departure into contextual examinations of three artists who repeatedly used passengers as subjects: Reginald Marsh (1898–1954), Donald Freeman (1908–1978), and Walker Evans (1903–1975). I argue that travel imagery attests to mobility as a common experience—an aspect of American life that viewers would recognize. Through a close examination of representations of mobility, it becomes clear that the motif appealed to these artists because it was simultaneously common and complicated—implicitly moving but explicitly stationary. As such, New York City’s commuters could convey social commentary, cultural observations, or artistic declarations. Marsh moved away from the specificity of his 1930s works and populated his transit settings with solitary female passengers with similar features, poses, and expressions. Freeman’s self-published magazine Newsstand demonstrates the close relationship between mass transit, mass media, and artists’ pursuit of democratic formats. Analysis of Evans’s methods and editorial decisions for his multi-year subway portraiture series highlights his concepts of candidness, anonymity, and truth.

While previous studies have used art to illustrate subway histories, I focus on interwar visual culture to examine transit’s significance in light of American Scene paintings, documentary photography, New Deal arts programs, and commercial publications. Primary sources provide the necessary information to trace the artists’ urban movements and public perception of transit modes. Scholarship on the experience of train travel in the nineteenth century complements recent developments in mobilities studies as an interdisciplinary pursuit, an approach that beneficially interweaves topics previously considered insular.
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INTRODUCTION

[The American] is devoured with a passion for locomotion, he cannot stay in one place; he must go and come, he must stretch his limbs and keep his muscles in play. … Whether it be that a continual competition has given him the habit, or that he has an exaggerated estimate of the value of time, or that the unsettled state of everything around him, keeps his nervous system in a state of perpetual agitation, or that he has come thus from the hands of nature, he always has something to be done, he is always in a terrible hurry.

—Michel Chevalier, 1839

From the arrival of European explorers on sailing ships in the fifteenth century to the current debates over high-speed railways in Texas and California, the issue of transportation in the United States has significant implications. In discussions of mid-nineteenth-century American landscapes, art historians emphasize the context of Manifest Destiny—a moral imperative to extend the country from coast to coast, with tracks and industry illustrating the nation’s superiority and ingenuity. As Michel Chevalier (1806–1879) noted in his report for the French Minister of the Interior on the young nation’s economic and cultural practices, Americans were “eminently pioneers” whose migratory nature did not expire with the end of westward expansion.¹

Artists’ presentations of trains made nationalistic statements and commemorated the machine responsible for the “annihilation of space and time.”² Just before the turn of the century, Americans learned of a new vehicle with which to traverse Whitman’s open roads—the private

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automobile. By 1955, author and critic Lewis Mumford referred to the car as the “sacred cow” that replaced the railroad in the American religion of technology. The automobile appealed to the increasingly suburbanized populace; by 1950 the number of cars on American roads was ninety times higher than it had been in 1910. The value placed on private vehicles is still evident physically in the nation’s car-centric infrastructure and financially in the corporate bailouts bestowed on automobile manufacturers in 2008–9.

Surprisingly, the only period in American history when the ridership of mass transit exceeded the number of private car drivers falls within the forty years of automobiles’ exponential proliferation. During the Great Depression and World War II, mass transportation thrived as an alternative to costly travel by railroads or private cars. For a country that prizes independence, self-sufficiency, and determination, the 1930s and 1940s challenged these values

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3 Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Open Road” appeared in *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1900), four years after the Duryea brothers sold their first “motor wagon” in Springfield, Massachusetts, and four years before Henry Ford created the Ford Motor Company in Detroit. In 1900 the U.S. had eight thousand registered automobiles, a number that rapidly escalated after the introduction of the Ford Model T in 1908.


5 In 1910 the number of registered automobiles was 0.45 million. Registered cars numbered 40.5 million in 1950.

with calls for community, sacrifice, and patience. The impact of mass transit is less dramatic than the transformative effect of railroads or automobiles, but its visual presence is profound. Considering the abundance of representations of mobility in American art, it is striking that scholars have not explored the ways mass transportation fits into our social and artistic history.

This dissertation examines the perception of group travel during the heyday of mass transit. Artists’ use of these subjects during the 1930s and 1940s reveals a nation that is geographically established, but socially unsettled. Images of New Deal-era passengers show people waiting to arrive at the “American Dream.” Instead of independent mobility, financial stability, and national security, these are scenes of an America stuck in transition. During this period, representations of mass transit provided a metaphor for the conflicts between personal ambition and collective struggle for economic and national security.

Whether station platforms or interior aisles, transportation spaces are interstitial sites or what Shelley Rice termed “nonspaces.” In Rice’s examination of French landscape photography, she observed the dissolution of place during train travel. Rather than identify a location based on

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7 Throughout this paper I use the terms public transit/transportation and mass transit/transportation interchangeably according to the definitions provided by the American Public Transportation Association. I do not distinguish between various modes of rail service (light, heavy, or commuter) apart from avoiding discussion of long-distance, intercity passenger rail lines because this subject has received ample interpretive efforts. The terms el and elevated are used for urban passenger trains on raised trellises.

8 This cliché is particularly fitting because it is simultaneously subjective and universal, individual and collective. Travelers have separate destinations but share a sense of expectation. The mythical “American Dream” was articulated by James Truslow Adams’ 1931 The Epic of America as, “not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.” Anderson’s description links transportation with broad concerns about achievement and social status; see The Epic of America (Safety Harbor, FL: Simon Publications, 1931), 214.

9 Shelley Rice, “Voyages without Steam or Sail: Afterimages from the Floating Head,” in Parisian Views (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 184. Wolfgang Schivelbusch used the phrases “in-between space” and “travel space” to refer to the location occupied during passage; see Schivelbusch, “Railroad Space
geographic position, the mechanically traversed landscape is defined by the time it takes to reach one’s destination. Modern mass transit shifts our focus to the experience of the traveler. As noted by social scientists Peter Adey, David Bissell, Derek McCormack, and Peter Merriman, the figure of a passenger attracts a wide range of inquiries because, “the passenger invites us to move away from imagining solitary individuals on the move towards considering the assemblages within which people on the move are sustained.”\(^{10}\) This dissertation upholds this observation by using depictions of travelers as a point of departure into examinations of both the artists and their subjects in the contexts of the United States and New York City, the Great Depression and World War II.

By focusing on the visual presentation of transit settings and incorporating the artistic, historic, and mechanical apparatuses surrounding these works, I argue that they attest to mobility as a common experience—an aspect of American life that viewers would recognize.\(^{11}\) The work of Reginald Marsh, Donald (Don) Freeman, and Walker Evans repeatedly incorporates transportation motifs as settings. Their depictions of New York transit are simultaneously commonplace scenes of daily life and meaningful examinations of physical and social environments in which the figures of travelers inherently reference a larger, unseen system.

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\(^{11}\) The word “common” is especially apt for this motif because it connotes familiarity and routine. The term also carries social class associations that fit discussions of mass transit; “common” applies to something that is not limited to the wealthiest members of society.
A NATION ON THE MOVE

A critical aspect of this dissertation concerns the historical motivations for Americans to engage in group travel. My study encompasses the years when the act of riding motor coaches and light rail evolved from a fiscal necessity to a patriotic duty. Three fundamental events spurred the need for efficient mass transportation in the United States between 1900 and 1950: urbanization, the Great Depression, and World War II. Booming city populations caused accidents, fatalities, and gridlock on roads teeming with street railways, horses, pedestrians, and motor vehicles. From the introduction of omnibuses, horsecars, and railroads in the early and mid-nineteenth century came the extensive systems of subways, buses, streetcars, trolleys, and elevateds. 12

As cities grappled with inadequate transportation infrastructure, the Great Depression caused unemployed workers and agricultural laborers to traverse the country in search of jobs. The scale of poverty was difficult for most Americans to comprehend. In 1932, Fortune magazine published Archibald MacLeish’s article, “Unemployment: ‘No One Has Starved’.” 13


13 Reginald Marsh created two illustrations (Outpost of a Hundred Cities and Hooverville) which accompanied MacLeish’s article. Archibald MacLeish (1892–1982), “Unemployment: ‘No One Has Starved’,” Fortune 6, no. 3 (September 1932): 18–29.
MacLeish’s first sentence completed the titular phrase, “No one has starved, which is not true.” He blamed the public’s ignorance on newspapers’ reluctance to expose the depth of the crisis. The average American in 1932 had not yet seen the impacts of the Depression firsthand, explained MacLeish: “Since the facts were never frankly faced as facts, people came to believe that American unemployment was relatively unimportant. They saw little idleness and they therefore believed there was little idleness.”\(^{14}\) As more journalists, politicians, academics, and civic leaders called for better awareness, artists found commercial and federal patrons eager for representations of both suffering and survival. The demand for reportorial accounts of current events manifested in New Deal arts programs and the immense popularity of picture magazines.

MacLeish’s article also reveals the ways financial collapse reignited the migratory tendencies Chevalier observed in the previous century. MacLeish described one consequence of the Depression: a “wandering population” loosed upon the nation’s byways: “Means of locomotion vary but the objective is always the same—somewhere else.”\(^{15}\) Artists’ views aboard subways, elevateds, and buses met a public thirsty for factual, first-person accounts. Images of mechanized mobility commingled with those showing Dust Bowl refugees, bread lines, and roadside drifters. Despite the economic stagnation of the Depression, sightseeing buses hauled tourists through cities and national parks.\(^{16}\) Cities pulled streetcar tracks from their roadways and replaced them with wider lanes and improved surfaces to accommodate fleets of buses.

Transportation remained in the forefront of national concerns during the 1940s. Troop movements exceeded the capacity of existing transit systems. Wartime gasoline and rubber

\(^{14}\) MacLeish, “Unemployment,” 19.  

\(^{15}\) MacLeish, “Unemployment,” 28.  


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Rations immediately stymied private motoring. Legislation and propaganda encouraged carpooling, walking, and using mass transportation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF TRANSIT IMAGERY

There are several recurring features in the images under examination. Artists often portrayed overburdened vehicles and mobile spaces awash in reading material and inhabited by somnolent travelers. The preponderance of crowds, text, and sleeping figures is not limited to transit scenes, rather these traits reflect the historical context and correspond to the bread lines, park benches, and roadsides shown in contemporary artworks. I incorporate these features in my analysis in order to emphasize the ways each artist chose to include, omit, or highlight the passenger experience within an identifiable time period.

Buses, elevateds, and subways forced strangers into closer contact than open-air public settings. Images such as James Penney’s Subway (1932; fig. 0.1) reveal the transit environment during peak hours, when “sardines” were packed into mobile containers. Artists cropped figures and skewed perspectives to enhance the discomfort of over-capacity buses or subways.

Many artists transcribed the newspaper headlines and commercial advertisements visible in public spaces. The inclusion of the written word bolstered the sense of recognition valued by artists working in the American Scene. Headlines or other transcribed texts offer insight on

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17 Japanese seizure of rubber plantations led to severe shortages of tires. Rubber rations began in 1941 and severely affected travel experiences until sales returned to normal in December 1945. Tires were old and in disrepair; their failure extended already lengthy journeys. The sale of new automobiles to civilians halted in January 1942 and the factories ceased production later that year. Gasoline rations (December 1942 to August 1945) further complicated American travel and despite government efforts, fuel stations began to run out of gas by mid-1942. Drivers were assigned license categories that dictated how often they could use their vehicles. Other changes included taxi operation limited to six days a week, bus stops spaced farther apart, and speed limits reduced to thirty-five miles per hour (promoted as “Victory Speed” when it was introduced in September 1942).
popular culture, national concerns, and passengers’ intellect or political leaning. By pairing formal observations with contemporary events, I delve into the messages artists inscribed within transit spaces.

Depictions of figures suspended mid-route provide new information on the perception of travel and social anxieties. The ideas of nonspaces and suspended motion are redoubled by the inclusion of exhausted, semiconscious figures. Passengers frequently slump, slouch, and sprawl in their seats; duration of national hardships and time spent in transit were unpredictable. Weary riders embody the connection between travel, workers’ routines, and employment anxieties. Bedraggled straphangers are evidence of the individual endurance required by public movement, war rations, and military service.

A final commonality of the artists in this study can be seen in their participation in mass media. Marsh, Freeman, and Evans each created images for the purposes of having them reproduced and dispersed. Through the selection of medium, style, and subject matter, they aligned with a nationwide desire for democratic communication. In seeking to make their work available to the broader public, they upheld notions that artists should connect with the masses. Whether through commercial publication or lithographic reproduction, these artists considered how their work reached its audiences and the impact of specific formats or placements. Mass transportation, particularly when located in large cities, has practical overlaps with mass communication in the form of newspapers, advertisements, and other print media.

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18 Michael Lobel’s examination of John Sloan’s illustrations focuses on the ways Sloan’s oeuvre, including the artist’s commercial output, reveals a “self-conscious and self-reflective” undercurrent running across medium and audience. This notion can be adapted to encompass the ways a multitude of artists working in the 1930s were depicting mobile spaces and then publishing these images in formats intended for viewing within mobile spaces. I touch on this self-reflective aspect of transit imagery in my discussion of Marsh and Freeman. Michael Lobel, John Sloan: Drawing on Illustration, New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2014.
EXPANSION UNDERGROUND, DESTRUCTION OVERHEAD

Architect and architectural theorist Rem Koolhaas (b. 1944) aptly traced the physical environment of Manhattan to its “culture of congestion.” Its large population and small geographic footprint made New York City an early leader in modes of transport and it continues to demonstrably outsize all other American transportation agencies. The timespan this paper examines was a period of heightened awareness to transit’s delayed progress. Jackhammers, drills, and dynamite surrounded Manhattanites for the first half of the twentieth century. The sensory onslaught culminated in the simultaneous construction of subways and destruction of elevated railways during the 1930s. Visual artists responded to this crescendo of mobile transformations by showing pedestrians and passengers in the midst of an incomplete network.


20 The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) provides annual “Facts and Figures” with an overview of the subway and bus systems as well as the ridership for each form of transportation from 2010 to 2015. During that time, the annual subway ridership has increased 158 million (from 1.604 billion in 2010 to 1.762 billion in 2015). The number of bus passengers decreased by more than forty-six million over the same five years; bus passengers totaled 650 million in 2015. See http://web.mta.info/nyct/facts/ridership/index.htm. In the American Public Transportation Association’s (APTA) most recent list of the nation’s fifty largest transit agencies, MTA oversees four of the top ten (the subway, New Jersey Transit, Long Island Rail Road, and Metro-North Commuter Railroad). For detailed reports on the state of public transportation in the U.S. see APTA’s 2015 Public Transportation Fact Book available online, http://www.apta.com/resources/statistics/Pages/transitstats.aspx. Further information on how mass transit compares to other means of travel is available from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (operated within the Department of Transportation). Their annual summary, the 2016 Pocket Guide to Transportation is also available online, http://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/sites/rita.dot.gov.bts/files/publications/pocket_guide_to_transportation/2016.

21 In addition to the transformations of light rail, the 1930s saw the creation of nine bridges, four subway tunnels, two traffic tunnels, significant road improvements and the East River Drive (now known as the FDR Drive). The key proponent of these projects was Robert Moses (1888–1981), who became the New York City Parks Commissioner in 1933 and used this office to push dramatic alterations to urban layout. Manhattanites also witnessed the completion of several major architectural projects in the 1930s: Daily News Building (1930), McGraw/Hill Building (1930), Chrysler Building (1930), Empire State Building (1931), and Rockefeller Center (1939) – including Radio City Music Hall (1932) and the Comcast Building, formerly the RCA Building (1933). These modern feats of scale and height rose above slums razed by the New York Housing Authority (formed in 1934).
The blocked roads, unfinished tracks, and deteriorating system all compounded an urban environment struggling through economic depression. The artworks created during this decade illustrate a period when residents tolerated the interruption of street-level traffic for the sake of improved mass transit.\(^22\)

As early as 1868, theorists advanced ideas of a city arranged in layers—separating ground-level, subterranean, and elevated traffic to avoid gridlock and safety hazards (fig. 0.2).\(^23\)

By the turn of the twentieth century, overhead railways operated in London, Liverpool, Berlin, Chicago, and New York.\(^24\) Manhattan’s jammed thoroughfares displayed the unwelcome consequences of so-called “el” trains. Optimistic intentions led to angry complaints of store owners whose entrances were permanently in shade and residents whose upper-level apartments

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\(^22\) While elevated and subterranean tracks were put in place, street tracks were demolished. The length of the city’s streetcar system peaked in 1923 at 1,208.19 miles; by August 26, 1937, approximately 470 miles had been extracted. Federal Writers’ Project, *Almanac for New Yorkers* (New York: Modern Age Books, 1938), 69. Ellen Ekedal notes the prevalence of contradictory forces in urban spaces; see Ekedal and Susan Barnes Robinson, *The Spirit of the City: American Urban Paintings, Prints, and Drawings, 1900-1952* (Los Angeles: Laband Art Gallery, Loyola Marymount University, 1986). This concept of opposing forces also appears in “Profiling the Passenger” (2012) where the authors note, “the passenger compiles some fascinating mobility-stillness diagrams that play on tensions of restfulness and restlessness; gravity and levity; store and forward,” Peter Adey et al., “Profiling the Passenger,” 172.


\(^24\) Introduced by Charles Harvey in New York in 1868, railways built above the streets were originally operated by steam engine and traveled three times faster than horses, but came with an exorbitant expense to build and added smoke to the already polluted airways. The first line went along Ninth Avenue, from Battery Park to Fifty-Ninth Street. Within ten years, elevated tracks traced four Manhattan avenues and branched into Brooklyn and Queens. By the 1890s, elevated tracks lined Manhattan’s Second, Third, Sixth, and Ninth Avenues and snaked outward into the boroughs. When Harvey died in 1913, he had outlived the best years of his innovation.
were filled with smoke, vibrations, and passersby. The tracks dissected once picturesque facades and strangled narrow roads.25

The city’s first subway broke ground in 1900, and with it, public support for the el lines began to wane. After four years of construction, the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) opened nine miles of underground tracks on October 27, 1904.26 In 1913, Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Company (BMT) became the city’s second subway operator.27 The two private companies leased their respective routes from the city under a 999 year contract. The “Dual Contracts System” expanded throughout the 1910s—adding an additional 325 miles of track, many of which the popular press ridiculed as “tracks to nowhere” because they ventured into relatively uninhabited areas.

25 Mayor John F. Hylan (1868–1936) succumbed to petitions from the Sixth Avenue Association to remove the Sixth Avenue el from Fifty-Third to Fifty-Ninth Streets in 1924, and during the ten years that these six blocks were trackless, their property value doubled. When the dismantling began again in 1938, a New York Times editorial cheered the removal of Sixth Avenue’s “dirty apron” and the clearing of the road’s “iron forest,” see Ernest La France, “Rebirth of an Avenue,” New York Times, March 19, 1939, 113. Rebuilding outdated storefronts was less expensive than relocating to more expensive real estate. The event exposed its businesses to sunshine for the first time since 1878 and concluded fifteen years of turmoil along the thoroughfare. (The Ninth, Second, and Third Avenue elevated tracks were torn down in 1940, 1942, and 1955 respectively.) While businesses reaped the benefits of switching from el to subway, the destruction of the el gave New Yorkers mixed feelings. They were excited to see Sixth Avenue return to wide, open space and hopefully bring commercial renters back, but people also knew that the tracks facilitated a unique tour of the city. Crowds came with cameras on the final days, and street level audiences cheered the last trains. (For information on the 168 miles of elevated tracks still in use by the New York subway system, see Chan Sewell, “The Spell of the El,” New York Times (May 1, 2005), written to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the el train’s final run along Third Avenue.) In the 1933 version of King Kong, the monstrous gorilla embodies the frustrations of many New Yorkers by smashing through the elevated tracks and peering into the windows of New York apartments. The demise of the el was a gradual, but inevitable result of the city’s decision to tunnel beneath the streets.

26 On the IRT’s opening day, one hundred thousand people waited in line with their nickel-fare, and disembarked at one of the twenty-eight stations including City Hall, Grand Central Terminal, Times Square, or the terminus at 145th Street in Harlem. Subways existed in European cities (London, Budapest, Glasgow, Boston, Paris, Berlin), but New York City’s was twice as large as others.

27 The BMT was the successor of the defunct Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company (BRT) which operated the borough’s railways from 1896 until its bankruptcy in 1919. The company was officially renamed BMT in 1923. The construction costs for both the IRT and BMT lines were shouldered by the municipal government which in turn leased the tracks to the private companies for operation.
Legislative negotiations for a third subway began percolating in 1920 with the intended goal of creating a system under municipal control and not connected to the existing lines. The Independent Subway System (IND), the youngest of New York’s subway providers, gained approval in 1924 and broke ground on March 14, 1925. Construction on the IND extended over fifty years but the majority of the routes opened in 1932 and 1940 (for a map of lower Manhattan highlighting these subway routes, see Appendix A).28

In light of the continual construction (and destruction) that took place in New York, depictions of passengers and transit setting commented on the upheaval of daily environments. Above and below the streets, artists working in the first half of the twentieth century responded to the city’s struggle to move residents and goods along overburdened routes with inadequate resources. With this context in mind, iconic images such as Alfred Stieglitz’s (1864–1946) *The Terminal* (1893; fig. 0.3) bear witness to the city’s challenging conditions. The transformation is more clearly presented in cityscapes by Robert Henri (1865–1929), George Bellows (1882–1925), John Sloan (1871–1951), and Ernest Lawson (1873–1939). Ashcan paintings often contain the el’s shadowed underbelly, avenues scarred by tires, and the distinctive contours of subway kiosks or elevated stations.29 These images provide a chronological and spatial backdrop

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28 Some sources used the acronym ISS instead of IND. The IND’s first fifty-seven miles cost $700 million and opened in September 1932; the final section to open did so in October 1989. Twenty-one of the system’s thirty sections opened between 1932 and 1940. In terms of New York’s subway system today, the numbered lines correspond to the oldest routes—those operated by the IRT. Trains following the lines A-G roughly overlap with what would have originally been IND tracks. The present-day J-S trains represent the system once operated by BMT.

29 Jasper F. Cropsey (1823–1900) designed New York’s elevated stations in the 1880s and labeled his aesthetic as “Hudson River Gothic”—a Gothic revival bungalow lifted in the air and accessible by tiered, pavilion staircases. The waiting rooms were covered with peaked, gabled roofs, complete with cupolas, and decorative balustrades. Their exteriors were painted apple-green with hunter-green and maroon trim; the interiors featured stained glass, decorative ironwork, and pot-bellied stoves. Raised stations repeatedly appear in city views as an identifying feature. The chalet-derived forms take center stage in works by Ruth Carroll, Joseph Raskin, Fred Becker, and Edward Laning. By the 1930s the structures
for the demands associated with transportation in the 1930s and 1940s. In addition to the Ashcan School, the art works I examine relate to a number of overlapping movements from the first half of the twentieth century: American Scene painting, Regionalism, Social Realism, the Fourteenth Street School, the Federal Art Project (FAP) and the Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information (FSA/OWI) photography project.

Artists understood the urban associations of mass transit. As Irving Lewis Allen noted in his study of urban colloquialisms, “The subway especially served as a trope for city life itself. The subway is a microcosm of the cauldron of great population size, forced density, anonymity, parallel lives among strangers, and the confrontation and accommodation of social variety.”30 In their selection of public vehicles and passengers, artists incorporated their class and regional affiliations while simultaneously affirming an evolving national identity.

Representations of New York’s mass transit often invoke the system’s troubled financial footing and contentious public relations. With three separate organizations competing for New Yorkers’ nickels, political and public debates about Gotham’s subways reached a fevered pitch during the 1930s. Until the IRT, BMT, and IND merged in 1940, their business arrangement cost the city millions of dollars annually.31

neared sixty years old but had changed very little except fresh coats of paint. Between 1907 and the 1930s Sloan used the elevated tracks snaking through Greenwich Village as an identifying marker of his neighborhood. For more information on Sloan’s cityscapes, see Rebecca Zurier, Picturing the City: Urban Vision and the Ashcan School (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and Heather Coyle ed., John Sloan’s New York (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).


31 The subject of unification was curiously presented in a 1937 pamphlet by The Women’s City Club of New York. The Tale of Topsy Transit: A Primer for Subway Sardines attempted to educate readers on the leading figures and financial issues surrounding unification. In simplified prose accompanied by linear illustrations, the narrative follows a young, blackface girl through the recent perils of transportation bureaucracy. The conclusion is a direct plea from Topsy to New Yorkers: “I am YOUR transit problem—the biggest problem New York has ever had,” (New York: Women's City Club, 1937), unpaginated. The
When international conflict began to threaten New York’s commercial ports, the newly unified transit system returned to its Depression-era role as a venue for municipal messaging. Rather than announcements for free entertainment or relief programs, rail stations and cars displayed air raid instructions and calls to purchase war bonds.\(^{32}\) With almost no time to adjust from the previous decade’s economic and transportation upheavals, New Yorkers grappled with the risks faced by the largest American city and the suffering of their European counterparts.

**THE NEW DEAL FOR VISUAL ARTS**

The New Deal arts programs are an essential part of the historical context for my project because they affected career trajectories, peer relationships, access to materials, public visibility, and aesthetic decisions regarding style and subject. Marsh, Freeman, and Evans each worked for the government in different capacities at some point during their careers.\(^{33}\)

George Biddle (1885–1973), a painter and childhood friend of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945), wrote to the newly inaugurated president in May 1933 to suggest that the federal government hire young artists to produce compelling public art in line with New Deal

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nickel fare, a primary cause of the system’s financial demise, remained a distinct feature of the New York City streetcars, elevated, subway, and buses from 1904 through 1948, when the New York City Transit Authority raised the cost to ten cents. The subway token, valued at fifteen cents, was introduced in 1953. The most recent rate hike occurred in March 2015 and raised the far from $2.50 to $2.75.

\(^{32}\) Lorraine B. Diehl summarized the period leading into World War II, “Everywhere, New Yorkers were reminded of their vulnerability,” *Over Here!: New York City during World War II* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 121. Aboard public transit, riders encountered wartime notices calling for foreign nationals to register for new identification cards, announcements of blackout and air raid procedures, and reminders such as, “Save gas and rubber—ride the subway!” or “It’s patriotic to ride the subway!” (These slogans, printed on the paper’s edge and not always visible in reproductions of wartime posters, were seen while performing research at the New York City Transit Museum.)

\(^{33}\) An abbreviated list of their government positions is as follows: Marsh: Treasury Section (1935), Treasury Relief Program (1937); Freeman: Public Works of Art Project (1934), Works Progress Administration (1936), and Federal Theater Project (1937); Evans: Farm Security Administration (1935–8).
initiatives. In December 1933, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) was the first federal program aimed at employing artists during the Great Depression. Its mandate was to pay unemployed artists to produce works for installation in public buildings across the country. It was succeeded by a much larger series of agencies created within the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Federal Project One, the official title for the arts programs overseen by the WPA, employed visual, musical, literary, and theatrical artists who qualified for federal relief. The intent was to distribute, perform, display, and install works of art to educate, uplift, and improve society. For visual artists, the Federal Art Program (FAP) provided employment

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34 In his autobiography, Biddle recalled how artists felt during the Great Depression: “Every artist in America, every intelligent and out-looking student of his times, knew that life here was drab and often pitiful or tragic. They knew that it could have justice and beauty. There was enough for all. No element was lacking. Through trial and error we must somehow reshuffle the constituent parts that formed the dreary design of our national life. For among those elements somewhere lay the picture of democratic justice and spiritual beauty,” *An American Artist’s Story* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), 267–8.

35 The PWAP started in December 1933 and ended in June 1934. Despite its brevity, the PWAP made significant headway on the issue of unemployed artists. In total, $1,312,000 paid 3,750 artists to create 156,000 works under the auspices of the PWAP. Edward Bruce (1879–1943) headed the PWAP nationally and Juliana R. Force (1876–1948), director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, oversaw the New York City region. Bruce, a lawyer and former administrator in the Treasury Department, studied painting in Italy and sold works for ten years before embarking on his government career. He avoided dictating exact subjects or styles for the artists under his watch, but he famously clarified that, “The subject matter assigned to them was the American scene in all its phases. Within this scope the artists were given the utmost freedom of expression,” quoted in Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art: The Government Art Projects of the 1930s with Examples from New York City and State* (Hamilton, NY: Brodock Press, 1977), 26n122. Though well-intentioned, Bruce’s dogmatic belief in art as a tool of cultural improvement resulted in many aspiring, avant-garde artists feeling stifled beneath the federal program. Soon after the PWAP ended, Bruce took on a different national art initiative and maintained his expectation of art representing the American Scene. From October 1934 to 1938, the Treasury Department oversaw The Section of Painting and Sculpture (often shortened to The Section). Unlike the PWAP and its subsequent iteration within the WPA, The Section drew its budget from the monies devoted to federal building projects. Juries selected the artists through a submission process and did not require that the individual establish relief status. Over 1,100 murals and three hundred sculptures are credited to this group.

36 The WPA endured eight years, from August 1935 to 1943, as one of the most contested programs initiated by Roosevelt’s administration. During that time it employed nine million people and cost twelve million dollars. Its achievements include the construction of roads, bridges, athletic fields, playgrounds, swimming pools, airports, sewers, public restrooms, and public buildings.
opportunities, training, studio spaces, materials, and perhaps most importantly, assured artists means to contribute to the country’s recovery and success.\textsuperscript{37}

MacLeish’s 1932 report on the human impact of the Depression highlighted the dire state of New Yorkers. One million of the city’s 3.2 million workers were unemployed. Families whose monthly income averaged $141.50 before October 1929, now endured waiting lists for government assistance and subsisted on an average earnings of $8.20 per month.\textsuperscript{38} Residents of New York City benefited greatly from New Deal programs. Despite their political differences, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia cooperated with President Roosevelt’s relief efforts. Of the total 3,750 employees of the PWAP, 1,050 resided in New York. On the FAP rosters, New Yorkers made up nearly half of all artists employed between 1935 and 1943. In monetary terms, one-

\textsuperscript{37} Visual art made up only two percent of the projects and programs spearheaded as part of the WPA. Federal Project One was the official name of the arts programs now often referred to as WPA, FAP, or both. Subsequent confusion about the nuances of the numerous art activities sponsored during the New Deal is understandable considering the employees were not overly concerned with which entity cut their paychecks; see Francis V. O’Connor, “The New Deal Art Projects in New York,” \textit{American Art Journal} 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1969), 66. In addition to the Federal Art Project, four other agencies found opportunities and assignments for unemployed artists from other fields: the Index of American Design, Federal Music Project, Federal Writers’ Project, and Federal Theatre Project. More categories existed within each dependent agency. Holger Cahill oversaw the FAP’s seven divisions: murals, easels, photographs, sculptures, graphics (printmaking), posters, motion pictures. Divisions tasked with teaching, exhibitions, and public programs also existed within the FAP. For more about Cahill and his incorporation of John Dewey’s ideas of cultural democracy, see Victoria Grieve, \textit{The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009). An estimated two million children attended at least one class sponsored by the FAP. The total output in numbers is astounding: 2,500 murals, 17,000 sculptures, 108,000 paintings, 250,000 prints from 11,000 plates, and two million silkscreened posters. In addition to the work produced for the FAP, ten thousand paintings, forty-three sculptures, and eighty-nine murals came from the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) which received WPA funding but was administered by the Treasury Department. This group differed from The Section because TRAP functioned as a relief employer and did not commission artists based on skill alone.

twentieth of the total U.S. population lived in the city, but one-seventh of the FAP allocation went to New York City residents.\(^{39}\)

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) co-existed with New Deal agencies tasked with integrating art into American life but its purpose was historical rather than artistic. During its six years of operation (1937–43), the FSA provided eighty thousand photos to print media companies, and more than twice that many reside in the FSA collection at the Library of Congress.\(^{40}\) Compared to the FAP, the Division of Information of the FSA employed relatively few photographers.\(^{41}\) Evans was among the earliest Information Specialists hired to record the

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\(^{40}\) As momentum for New Deal relief initiatives waned and the United States entered World War II, the FSA was transferred to the Office of Emergency Management and renamed OWI. The collection is online, Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives, Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/.

\(^{41}\) Additional comparison and information on how various New Deal agencies intersected is available in Ann Prentice Wagner, *1934: A New Deal for Artists* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2009). The FAP also employed photographers to complete independent projects and to document the agency’s activities. Perhaps the best known FAP photography project started in August 1935 when Berenice Abbott (1898–1991) received approval for a series she later summarized as, “To chronicle in photographs the changing aspect of the world’s greatest metropolis, [...] to capture the spirit of the metropolis, its hurrying tempo, its congested streets, the past jostling the present,” quoted in Francis V. O’Connor ed., *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973). In 1939, the 302 resulting pieces were donated to the Museum of the City of New York (MCNY) and ninety-seven were published as *Changing New York*. Elizabeth McCausland provided captions consisting of building construction dates, site histories, or a brief explanation of the subject’s importance. As Abbott’s description suggests, many of the images focus on the movement of city dwellers. *Changing New York* includes views of Manhattan’s bridges, el stations, bus terminals, and crowded intersections. While it closely relates to my dissertation topic, the series was a historical endeavor and did not focus on individual passengers or social interactions. Her photographs do not engage the human experience of the city’s transformation as much as the altered physical appearance of the city itself. Abbott’s original donation as well as her papers and hundreds of additional materials related to this project can be viewed through the MCNY online collection, http://collections.mcny.org/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult_VPage&VVID=24UP1G31DWC6&SMLS=1&RWH=1440&RH=692. The New York Public Library digitized its collection of prints and contact sheets related to *Changing New York*, see http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/changing-new-york#/?tab=about.
Resettlement Administration’s efforts to prevent and assuage the agricultural crisis and those it dislocated from their homes.

*Toward Los Angeles, California* (1937; fig. 0.4) a photograph by Dorothea Lange (1895–1965), exemplifies the way transportation most often appears in the FSA/OWI files. The image shows two male figures, perhaps a father and son, walking along a dirt road. No homes or buildings are visible; civilization is indicated by the receding row of electrical poles on the left edge and a large billboard on the right. The advertisement for Southern Pacific, a white wall on an otherwise barren strip of land, appears perpendicular to the figures’ trajectory. The textual command seems more emphatic written in all capital letters and easily legible on the plain surface—“Next time try the train. Relax.” Lange’s composition reinforces the ironic contrast between her human subjects and the commercial instructions. Although the FSA photographers’ assignments rarely included large American cities, the issues of movement, migration, and relocation are recurring features of their rural treks. When compared to the images produced by artists employed by agencies within the WPA or Treasury Department, photographs like *Toward Los Angeles* become all the more sobering.

**THREE CASE STUDIES**

In order to most effectively demonstrate the range of concerns captured by this motif, I focus on three artists who each made extensive use of mobile subjects. Chapters are devoted to Reginald Marsh (1898–1954), Don Freeman (1908–1978), and Walker Evans (1903–1975) and fall in roughly chronological order based on the years when each produced the majority of their transportation views. Each artist in this study was interested in conveying the appearance of authenticity: realistic figures based on fellow New Yorkers.
Their biographies also contain general similarities that impacted their interactions with mass transit. At some point each was paid by the federal government to produce art. All lived in New York City for a period of time. All used mass transportation as their primary means of getting around.⁴²

Reginald Marsh was an upper class, Ivy League-educated, artistic celebrity. As a young man he searched for uninhibited subjects in New York’s entertainment and leisure settings. Marsh’s early works set in the subway provide the central topic of chapter one. Passengers appear in his art for nearly two decades starting with his newspaper cartoons in the 1920s. The series and scenes he produced for the *New York Daily News* and the *New Yorker* reveal Marsh’s skilled synthesis of direct observation with caricature. I use his diaries and papers to track his most frequent transit routes and rely on archival photographs of lost works to create a more comprehensive list of his mobile subjects. Over his career, Marsh moved away from the specificity that gave his 1930s works a greater sense of realism. His altered approach is evidenced by the repetitive features, poses, and expressions in representations of female passengers. I conclude this chapter with a comparison of *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* (1930) and *Easter on the IRT* (1940) as an illuminating contrast between gritty realism and idealized recollections.

Don Freeman, best known as a children’s book illustrator, used written accounts and serial distribution methods to share the human theater of New York’s thoroughfares. As a result of his intention to produce art for broad audiences and circumvent traditional art market practices, Freeman distributed his artwork through *Newsstand*, a one-man, lithographic magazine. After short intervals of employment in New Deal arts programs, Freeman began

⁴² Marsh never got a driver’s license, Freeman bought a car well after the Depression, and Evans drove during his FSA assignments but relied on the subway once settled in New York City.
publishing *Newsstand* in September 1936 and released issues sporadically over the next two decades. My discussion of *Newsstand* focuses on the ways this periodical reflected contemporary trends in picture magazines, reportorial accuracy, and the expansion of art audiences. Prints released in the wartime editions of *Newsstand* reveal the ways American propaganda and defense preparations impacted urban visual culture.

In the third chapter I discuss Walker Evans’s subway portraits taken between 1938 and 1941, unseen by the public until 1956, and published as *Many Are Called* in 1966. Originally a writer, he abandoned his literary ambitions and became a tireless advocate of documentary style photography. For Evans, authenticity lured him to make subterranean pictures and delay their publication. He hid his camera to catch subjects unaware and then ensured his secretive approach was understood by future audiences. I examine his methods and editorial decisions in light of the contemporary fad for candid photography and the critical success of his 1938 *American Photographs* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Special attention is given to the selection and presentation of the subway portraits in their various published forms as a way to highlight Evans’s concepts of candidness, anonymity, and truth.

**DAUMIER, A TRANSPORTATION TRAILBLAZER**

Before summarizing the scholarly footing for my project, it is necessary to explain an antecedent for American views of mass transit. Artists working in the early twentieth century drew upon the corpus of transportation images produced in the previous century by Honoré Daumier (1808–1879). Daumier created numerous lithographs and cartoons showing humorous social interactions and divisions within the close quarters of Parisian omnibuses and trains during the 1860s.
The influence of Daumier on American artists who chose mobile subjects was profound. For Marsh, Freeman, and Evans, the Frenchman’s career was inspirational in multiple ways. Like Daumier before them, the artists in my study took advantage of contemporary news media as an opportunity for employment and public visibility. The newsprint and magazines bearing their drawings were sold and consumed by the masses who then became the subjects of transportation imagery. Daumier earned his income as a commercial illustrator, mastered lithographic techniques, and painted works that challenged authorities and widened the scope of possible subjects.

In *Interior of an Omnibus: Between a Drunk and a Butcher* (1839; fig. 0.5) the humor results from the contrasting passengers—a visual juxtaposition reinforced by the accompanying text. The subtitle identified the two men as a butcher and a drunk, and the internal script (seen on the poster overhead), enhanced the comic effect by reminding readers that intoxicated passengers are not allowed aboard the omnibus. Daumier’s scenes of transportation often used etiquette as the source of humor. Other social encounters Daumier lampooned include the lack of personal space aboard crowded vehicles, the brusque behavior of transit operators, and the uncomfortable

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43 Marsh’s friend and patron, William Benton, made the association between the artist and Daumier explicit in his article, “Reginald Marsh—American Daumier,” *Saturday Review* 38, December 24, 1955, 8–9. For an example of a critic who used Daumier’s style to describe Marsh’s urban motifs while the latter was still working, see Scudder Middleton, “Marsh and the Art Editors,” *Demcourier* 13, no. 4 (June 1943): 19–20. Freeman summarized his youthful aspirations to act as New York’s version of Daumier when he first arrived in the city: Freeman, *Come One, Come All* (New York: Rinehart, 1949), 66. Evans wrote that the subway was the perfect setting for a “modern Dickens or Daumier,” and pointed out its value as “a sociological gold mine,” in “Walker Evans: The Unposed Portrait,” *Harper’s Bazaar* 95 (March 1962): 120.

realization that one shares a transit space with criminal instigators. His comic observations resonate today much as they did with their original audiences.

Daumier’s *The Third-Class Carriage* (c. 1862–64; fig. 0.6) directly ties to transit scenes from the 1930s and 1940s in part because of its similar subject matter, but more important, it was available for study on the walls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The year after the Havemeyer family donated *The Third-Class Carriage* to the Metropolitan, Alfred Barr (1902–1981) curated a show of Daumier’s lithographs and paintings at MoMA. Another version of *The Third-Class Carriage* was included in the 1930 exhibition. Barr’s catalogue essay encouraged visitors to study the works as examples of sociological, humanitarian, democratic art. Thomas Craven (1888–1969), a vocal proponent of the authenticity he identified in American Regionalist artists, devoted a chapter to Daumier in his *Men of Art* (1934). In a loose combination of biography and visual analysis, the author emphasized the French artist’s rejection of fashionable styles and dedication to “the commonest aspects of French life,” that Craven considered “anything but trivial.” Unlike the “deliberately unintelligible” painters who adopted foreign trends, Craven positioned Daumier as a beacon of brave determination in the face of a corrupt government.

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45 There are over a dozen painted versions of *The Third-Class Carriage*, though several have been lost. The work at the Metropolitan is noteworthy for its incomplete state, which would have appealed to art students interested in learning Daumier’s techniques. The “second” *The Third-Class Carriage*, on view in New York for the 1930 MoMA exhibition, is in a more finished state and resides in the collection of the Ottawa Museum of Art. It is possible that Marsh, Freeman, and Evans were familiar with both the Metropolitan and Ottawa iterations of the scene. They also could have easily studied Daumier’s prints in the collections of friends or the New York Public Library. Daumier’s work was also widely reproduced in books and catalogues.


HISTORIOGRAPHY

Before the twentieth century’s various modes of travel, the railroad provided the fastest and most fashionable means of crossing the country. Art and cultural historians Leo Marx, Susan Danly, Barbara Novak, Nancy Anderson, and Stephen Daniels have each commented on the formal, iconographical, and historical significance of trains in the paintings and photographs of the American terrain during the Industrial Revolution.48

Though existing scholarship on the topic of mass transportation in American art is minimal, two subjects that received transit-oriented examinations are Alfred Stieglitz and the Ashcan School. In “Alone on the Sidewalks of New York” (2005) Joanne Lukitsh investigated the social content of Stieglitz’s city scenes and his search for subjects on foot.49 The probative value of incorporating artist’s movements within New York City also appears in Ellen Wiley Todd’s survey of the Fourteenth Street School as well as publications on Sloan and the Ashcan School.50 Rebecca Zurier’s Picturing the City (2006) highlights the Ashcan artists’ training in


50 Ellen Wiley Todd, The “New Woman” Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), http://www.ucpress.edu/op.php?isbn=9780520074712. Many of the creators mass transit images were trained at the Art Students League under the instruction of Sloan or Kenneth Hayes Miller (1876–1952). Miller’s frequent use of female shoppers occasionally
printmaking and illustration. She describes New York as an environment of perpetual visibility, where interacting with strangers and tolerating diversity were mandatory. In a separate study, Heather Coyle and Joyce Schiller investigated Sloan’s frequent walking routes near his Chelsea residence and the contrasts between his views of urban crowds and the more intimate scenes of solitary women. Issues surrounding perception and privacy extend into group travel; these studies of Ashcan artists ground my interest in the unspoken mores and expectations of passengers.

My project relies on the wealth of information on the American Scene and New Deal art programs. The FSA/OWI collection of photographs continues to be studied as an example of included bus stops (as in Pause by a Window (Waiting for the Bus), c. 1930, etching), but his Fourteenth Street School contemporaries (including Marsh, Isabel Bishop (1902–1988), and Raphael Soyer (1899–1987)) frequently used transportation settings for their scenes of daily life.


government propaganda, the origins of documentary photography, and a valuable source of historical information for the 1930s and early 1940s, but has not been mined specifically for its transportation images.\textsuperscript{53}

A rare comment on the presence of transit motifs in the work of numerous artists appears in Karal Ann Marling’s study of New Deal murals. Marling proposed that mobility functioned as

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a motivational and escapist feature of 1930s painted walls. While this dissertation primarily examines mass transit’s interior spaces, Marling theorized about the external views of Americans (and American machines) on the move. In her words,

Zipping airplanes and thundering stagecoaches alike proposed a dynamic, impatient alternative to Depression stagnation. Conestogas and steam engines coursing westward revived the frontier option and link national progress to motion, machinery, and turning wheels. Motion invited escape from troubled times. Projected upon the American past, motion constituted a model for renewed activity in the present, but more especially, a magic carpet to tomorrow.54

Among the many thematic trends Marling identified on the post office walls decorated during the New Deal, she identified the artists’ use of transportation as evidence of the nation’s triumphant history and symbolically arriving at a prosperous future. The murals’ activity and dynamism does not carry over into the prints and easel paintings, nor do these escapist montages reappear in the New Deal’s photographic record. I draw attention to the ways mobile settings were decidedly stationary.

Related to my thematic approach, Hanno Hardt’s article, “Gaze of the Artist,” (2000) cogently explains the connections between urbanism, national identity, and American newspapers in the twentieth century.55 Colleen Striegel and Shaun Higgins’s contribution to the catalogue The Newspaper in Art (1996) is a useful survey of the interplay between two forms of visual communication spanning four centuries. Their essay draws attention to the artists’ selection and inclusion of newsprint and headlines and explains, “artists use newspapers as


significant modifiers—visual adjectives that enable viewers to better understand depicted persons and situations.” My examinations of depicted reading material apply this concept of visual adjectives but limit the time span in order to more fully explore the art and artist’s context.

Sources consulted on the history of picture magazines, illustration, publications, and commercial artists included studies by Erika Doss, Cara Finnegan, Jason Edward Hill, and the catalogue *Art for Every Home: Associated American Artists, 1934–2000* (2015). Michael Lobel’s examination of John Sloan’s illustrations focuses on the ways Sloan’s oeuvre, including the artist’s commercial output, reveals a “self-conscious and self-reflective” undercurrent running across medium and audience. I adapt this notion to encompass the ways a multitude of artists working in the 1930s were depicting mobile spaces and then publishing these images in formats intended for viewing within mobile spaces. I touch on this self-reflective aspect of transit imagery in my discussion of Marsh and Freeman.

Of all the artists I researched for this dissertation, Marsh had received the most scholarly attention. In addition to the foundations laid by Todd’s *The ‘New Woman Revised’* (1993) and Marilyn Cohen’s exhibition catalogue *Reginald Marsh’s New York* (1983), this project relied on information compiled by Norman Sasowsky’s *The Prints of Reginald Marsh* (1976) and the recent analyses presented in Barbara Haskell’s exhibition catalogue *Swing Time: Reginald

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I found Carmenita Higginbotham’s dissertation, *Saturday Night at the Savoy* (2005), and subsequent book, *The Urban Scene* (2015), to be enormously useful for parsing out the humor and stereotypes shown in Marsh’s oeuvre. This effort was also assisted by Kathleen Spies’s “‘Girls and Gags’” (2004), which scrutinized the artist’s use of the female body in burlesque settings. Of critical importance to my study was the accessibility of the artist’s immensely detailed papers through the Archives of American Art. The digitized diaries and sketchbooks enabled my preliminary cartographic investigations and offered photos or sketches for dozens of Marsh’s transit images that are unavailable elsewhere.

Correspondence with Don Freeman’s son, Roy Freeman, clarified aspects of the artist’s time in New York and the publication history of *Newsstand*; these details supplemented the foundational research presented in Edith McCulloch’s *The Prints of Don Freeman: A Catalogue Raisonné* (1988).

Despite some creative license with chronology, Don Freeman’s

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60 Higginbotham’s use of a list of Marsh’s depictions of black figures in paintings 1928–38 as an appendix to her dissertation demonstrated the value in simple documentation and led me to create comparable lists to synthesize my research, “Saturday Night at the Savoy: Blackness and the Urban Spectacle in the Art of Reginald Marsh,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2005); Higginbotham, *The Urban Scene: Race, Reginald Marsh, and American Art* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2015); Kathleen Spies, “‘Girls and Gags’: Sexual Display and Humor in Reginald Marsh’s Burlesque Images,” *American Art* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 32–57.


autobiography proved to be a vital resource to determine his locations and experiences in New York.\textsuperscript{63}

Crucial sources for my investigation of Evans’s subway photos were Sarah Greenough’s \textit{Walker Evans Subways and Streets} (1991) and Mia Fineman’s essay in \textit{Walker Evans} (2000). Both authors offer impressive analyses of the subway portraits in the context of Evans’s career and their inclusion of materials from the artist’s archive proved invaluable.\textsuperscript{64}

In recent decades, and especially surrounding its 2004 centennial celebration, the New York City subway received more scholarly attention.\textsuperscript{65} These studies provide details on the engineering and planning of subterranean movement, but rarely focus on the socio-historic contexts apart from politics or economy. I relied heavily on the information and digitized materials available through nycsubway.org.\textsuperscript{66} The books most closely related to my topic are Michael Brooks’ \textit{Subway City} (1997) and Tracy Fitzpatrick’s \textit{Art and the Subway} (2009): both trace the history of artists’ representations of the New York subway.\textsuperscript{67} My dissertation

\textsuperscript{63} Don Freeman, \textit{Come One, Come All!} (New York: Rinehart, 1949).


\textsuperscript{66} Nycsubway.org contains essays on stations, routes, technology, vehicles, decoration, as well as digitized maps and photographs from the system’s origins through present day; David Pirmann (webmaster), \texttt{http://nycsubway.org/wiki/Main\_Page}.

\textsuperscript{67} Michael W. Brooks, \textit{Subway City: Riding the Trains, Reading New York} (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Tracy Fitzpatrick, \textit{Art and the Subway: New York Underground} (New Brunswick,
incorporates these methodologies but draws on examples from visual culture in addition to artwork and isolates two decades for detailed discussion rather than survey the subway system’s existence.

My approach and arguments correspond to Sunny Stalter-Pace’s investigation into how the subway appears in literature. Many of Stalter-Pace’s assertions about transit’s appeal to writers could safely be transposed onto artists working at the same time. *Underground Movements* provides an exceedingly rich literary analysis that connects disparate writers and their use of rhythm and theme to shed light on their perception and experience of subterranean travel. In order to accomplish her primary goal, Stalter-Pace limits the amount of historical context offered for each thematic area. Aside from my focus on visual artists, the use of context underpinning this study sets it apart from Stalter-Pace’s publication.

Thematic analyses, such as the one proposed by this dissertation, strengthen the field of American art history by incorporating lesser-known artists and placing their work alongside well-recognized members of the canon. Erika Doss’s iconographical interpretations in “Looking at Labor” (2002) demonstrate the advantages of concentrating on a single motif in a limited time period. Doss’s conclusion, one that also applies to transportation scenes, argues the stasis shown

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in many 1930s artworks is reflective of a national mood of resignation—a country waiting for the end of the Great Depression.69

This study contributes to the growing corpus of interdisciplinary scholarship dealing with the movements of people, objects, and ideas.70 Social scientists John Urry and Mimi Sheller outlined this approach in their 2012 article, “The New Mobilities Paradigm,” and call for re-examinations of topics previously treated as insular.71 To remedy the historically “a-mobile” methodologies of their field, Urry and Sheller call for research that encompasses not just the relocation of people and objects, but also the activities, structures, technology, economies, and issues of accessibility connected to mobilities. These ideas corroborate my interest in the relationships between artists, mass media, the art market and public access to artworks.

This dissertation advocates for a similar shift—to mobilize art historical figures and topics predominantly studied as disconnected. By examining the way group travel appears in works by three artists, my dissertation demonstrates the valuable complexities of an intentionally familiar motif. Marsh, Freeman, and Evans each repeatedly depicted passengers because the subject was simultaneously common and complicated—implicitly moving but explicitly stationary. As such, the railcars of New York could convey social commentary, cultural

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observations, or artistic declarations. By closely reading examples of these artists’ representations of mobility, it becomes clear that their interest in public transportation was not the result of a subject’s destination or the system’s ingenuity. These artists selected transportation settings as distinctive spaces, but transit’s distinction during this period was its inability to circumvent national strife. This study questions both the corporeal copresence of passengers during transit, and the translation of this experience by artists.
Figure 0.1
James Penney
*Subway*, 1932
Lithograph
12 1/4 x 17 1/4 inches
Edition of 10
New-York Historical Society
Figure 0.2
John M. August Will
*Proposed Arcade Railway – Under Broadway, view near Wall Street*, c. 1868
Lithograph
17 7/8 x 23 1/8 inches
Museum of the City of New York, 29.100.2400
Figure 0.3
Alfred Stieglitz
The Terminal, 1893
Gelatin silver print
3 9/16 x 4 1/2 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1949.3.75
Published in Camera Work, No. 36 (October 1911)
Figure 0.4
Dorothea Lange
*Toward Los Angeles, California*, March 1937
Nitrate negative
2 1/4 x 2 1/4 inches
Library of Congress, LC-USF34-016317-E
Figure 0.5
Honoré Daumier
*Interior of an Omnibus: Between a Drunk and a Butcher*, 1839
Number 8 of the series *Types Parisiens*, 1839–43
Lithograph
6 3/8 x 9 5/8 inches
Figure 0.6
Honoré Daumier
*The Third-Class Carriage*, c. 1862–64
Oil on canvas
25 3/4 x 35 1/2 inches
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 29.100.129
Chapter One

REGINALD MARSH

Go out into the street, stare at the people. Go into the subway. Stare at the people. Stare, stare, keep on staring. Go to your studio; stare at your pictures, yourself, everything. Know something of current cant, which is louder than wisdom and will do no harm.

—Reginald Marsh, 1944

This invective to break social mores appeared in Reginald Marsh’s 1944 article, “Let’s Get Back to Painting.” Marsh (1898–1954) called aspiring artists to action and used his career as an example of how prolonged practice and keen observation of one’s environment were critical for success. Interestingly, Marsh’s own reliance on direct observation diminished as his career progressed. Although it could be argued that realism and personal experience heavily influenced Marsh’s early career, my examination of his transit imagery exposes the increasingly idealized, fictitious elements of his work in the 1940s and 1950s.

Transit spaces were frequent settings for Marsh’s cartoons in the 1920s and the motif persisted in his oeuvre until his death in 1954. Between 1928 and 1935 Marsh produced eleven paintings and at least sixteen etchings of mass transit subjects. (For a chronological list of his depictions of passengers, see Appendix B.) This chapter considers Marsh’s depictions of travel from his commercial illustrations through his mid-career work during World War II and tracks their progression from scenes of diversity and human juxtapositions toward a more generic construct of female travelers.

73 After 1935, Marsh did not paint the subject again for three years. Then, between 1938 and 1944, he produced at least nineteen more paintings using the public transit motif, many of which show a solitary female standing along a platform or a seated female passenger facing the viewer. His frequent depiction of women (alone or in groups) is examined later in this chapter.
Carmenita Higginbotham’s dissertation examined the depiction of African-Americans in Marsh’s oeuvre. About his most iconic subway scene, *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* (1930; fig. 1.1), she observed that the central, sleeping figure “symbolically goes nowhere.”\(^{74}\) I agree with this assertion but do not, as Higginbotham suggests, trace this stasis to the man’s restful state. The stationary limbo identified in *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* is apparent in nearly all of Marsh’s mobile settings. As his interest in representing individual or geographic specificity waned, the ambiguity of his transit works exemplifies the concept of these settings as nonspaces, and their inhabitants as unknowable.\(^{75}\)

**MAPPING MARSH’S URBAN ROUTES**

When Marsh arrived in New York City as a Yale graduate in 1920, the twenty-two year old was familiar with the city; he grew up ten miles from Manhattan and visited its streets on sketching trips for his collegiate journal.\(^{76}\) At that time, the Interborough Rapid Transit


Company (IRT) and Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Company (BMT) operated two competing networks of public transit. Starting in 1925, Marsh witnessed the installation of the Independent Subway System (IND) tunnels, an event which signaled the demise of the elevated tracks lining the island’s avenues and branching eastward to Brooklyn’s shores. The media coverage of the political and financial entanglements accompanying the city’s transit transformation would have been unavoidable; his depicted passengers rolled over tracks plagued by debate and complaints. Like many Manhattanites after IND stations opened in 1932 and prior to the system’s 1940 unification, Marsh traversed the city aboard vehicles operated by all three subway companies.

Marsh followed his impulse for exploration into Gotham’s leisure and entertainment spaces and he paired his urban flâneurie with copious note-taking. When he died, Marsh left behind more than two hundred notebooks, sketchbooks, daily calendars, and diaries. His records evidence a diligent work ethic, an interest in both contemporary artists and the market, and accumulated expertise in his local transit system.

77 Laning first found these sketchbooks after Marsh’s death. They were in chronological order and included written notations about the weather, typography, and the color of lighting used in settings. Reginald Marsh Papers, 1897–1955, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/reginald-marsh-papers-9072. [Hereafter referred to as Marsh Papers.] I examined Marsh’s diaries and desk calendars and tracked recurring locations, routes, and vehicles. These personal records were particularly useful for determining Marsh’s residences over time. As with most digital research, the image quality caused several challenges. Poor resolution or exaggerated contrast made small fonts in newspaper clippings or faded captions written in pencil indiscernible. Dates provided in lists of artworks occasionally conflict with notes made in daily diaries because Marsh altered and reused titles over time. The digitized calendars and planners presented serious complications. The desk calendars (1931–34) and engagement diaries (1935–54) are more useful for determining his movements at home and abroad. The 1931 Diary was a daily calendar in which Marsh took notes. Only the reverse, undated side of these pages appears online, so I estimated dates based on biographical events or works mentioned. The 1933 calendar appears in two different folders within his papers, but the 1934 calendar was not digitized. In 1935, Marsh began using pocket-sized Red Diaries which contain a single line for each date. His daily movements are more difficult to estimate from 1935 onward because the restricted space limited his notes to major events, appointments, or social engagements.
Upon arrival in 1920, Marsh rented apartments in Greenwich Village. (For a map of lower Manhattan, see Appendix A.) As a newlywed in 1923, and again in 1930–1, he lived near his in-laws in Flushing (Queens) and found a short-term studio space at 230 East Fifteenth Street to complete his Art Students League assignments. All other known addresses for Marsh’s apartments and studios are in the vicinity of Union Square. His Fourteenth Street neighbors included many members of the eponymous school.

Marsh’s records from the 1930s give the impression that he rarely filled two days in the same manner. Certain activities, such as gallery openings, dining with friends, and meeting with editors were monthly rituals. He made regular trips to Flushing, Essex Fells (New Jersey), and Woodstock (New York) by train. He devoted several days a week to attending theatre or burlesque performances and visiting night clubs, often stopping by multiple venues in an

\[78\] Marsh married Betty Burroughs in 1923 and thus entered into an important family in the New York City art scene. His father-in-law, Bryson Burroughs, was a painter and curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The elder Burroughs joined Kenneth Hayes Miller as a charter member of the Whitney Studio Club in 1924, the same year Marsh received his first one-man exhibition in its gallery. Marsh’s brother-in-law, Alan Burroughs, became an art critic and historian and penned one of the earliest reviews of Marsh. Burroughs’s article primarily describes the artist’s difficult and introverted personality; “Young America—Reginald Marsh,” *Arts* 3, no. 2 (February 1923): 138–39. The Burroughs’s artistic social circle is one of several ways Marsh established beneficial connections in the contemporary art market. A chronological list of Marsh’s apartment and studio addresses in New York City is as follows: a studio near Union Square (summer 1926), a studio on the top floor of 21 East Fourteenth Street (1928), 230 East Fifteenth Street (1931), 9 West Fourteenth Street (June 1932), 11 East Twelfth Street (Feb 27, 1933–34), 5 East Fourteenth Street ( sometime in 1934 or 1935), 9 West Fourteenth Street (as of March 2, 1935), 7 West Fourteenth Street (as of September 1935), 1 Union Square (as of June 1939), 4 East Twelfth Street (September–December 1939, and again in 1942), and 1 Union South (1941). For further information on the proximity of Marsh’s studio to those of his contemporaries, see Ellen Wiley Todd, *The “New Woman” Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 84–135, http://www.ucpress.edu/op.php?isbn=9780520074712.

\[79\] Flushing was connected to the IRT/7 train as of January 1928. He also could use the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) to make the roundtrip, though the LIRR was infamous for its weekday crowds.
evening. Occasionally Marsh recorded his mode of transit in his diaries but usually this information is omitted.

Based on their repetition in his papers, some of his favorite bars and restaurants were in Greenwich Village (Jimmy Kelly’s, Julius’ Tavern, Jumble Shop, and Maxim’s). The Village was also home to the Whitney Studio Club (147 West Fourth Street), the Whitney Museum of American Art (8–12 West Eighth Street) and the New School of Social Research (66 West Twelfth Street). For Marsh and other Union Square residents, the most conveniently located burlesque club was Irving Place Burlesque. His apartment was only a short walk away from the Jewish Rialto (also known as the Yiddish Theater District). The BMT Broadway Line connected Union and Times Squares; the latter was Marsh’s destination when he attended dance shows at The Gaiety Theatre and Minsky’s Republic. BMT trains also traveled to Rockaway Beach and Coney Island.

From the Union Square neighborhood, Marsh could easily access two arterial subway routes. The city’s original subway tunnel, the IRT Lexington Avenue Line (also known as the

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80 An example of Marsh’s average day “on the town” is Thursday, September 8, 1932 when his notes include the chilly, windy weather, painting Gaiety Burlesque in the morning, taking the 3:00 p.m. train into New York City, passing by Rehn’s Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, the New Yorker offices, The Yale Club, and concluding the day by meeting a friend for dinner and then attending the opening of a play on Broadway. Marsh Papers, desk calendars, 1931–34, box 3, folder 12, frame 226.

81 Vehicular details most often appear paired with his jaunts to Coney Island, which he tallied annually. After producing illustrations of Coney Island for Vanity Fair in 1922, Marsh relied on the park’s summer clientele for annual inspiration. In 1931 and 1932 he tracked his visits in his diaries and made the trip fifteen and seventeen times respectively. He variously rode buses, boats, or the BMT to reach the eastern shores of Brooklyn.

82 Greenwich Village was the long-time home of Marsh’s teacher, John Sloan, and his frequent artistic foil (according to critics), Edward Hopper. Sloan spent a dozen years (1915–27) at 88 Washington Place and then moved to 53 Washington Square South (1927–35). Hopper kept his 1 Washington Square studio for over five decades (1913–67).

East Side Line) extended nearly the full length of Manhattan, from South Ferry to 125th Street in Harlem. Its trains stopped at Fifty-Ninth Street, from which one could walk to a number of leading galleries or browse the installations at the Museum of Modern Art’s galleries in the Heckscher Building.\textsuperscript{84} Taking this train farther north would lead him to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The IRT serviced visitors and residents to Harlem where Marsh spent evenings studying revelers and performers at the Cotton Club, Connie’s Inn, New Gotham, The Savoy Ballroom, or the Sugar Cane Club.\textsuperscript{85} His commute to anatomy classes at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1931 would have required a lengthy ride on the IRT Broadway Line to Washington Heights.\textsuperscript{86}

The Art Students League remains in its original location near the southwest corner of Central Park, a few blocks from IRT, BMT, and IND subway stations. If Marsh wanted to take advantage of the “open air” touted in the advertisement shown in \textit{Why Not Use The ‘L’?}, he hopped on the southbound Third Avenue el on its way over the Bowery and toward the Battery; northbound Second and Third Avenue els traced the eastern side of Manhattan.

\textsuperscript{84} Galleries located on or near East Fifty-Ninth Street include: Rehn, Macbeth, Kleeman, Ferargil, Midtown, Milch, Weyhe, MacDonald. The Museum of Modern Art opened in November 1929 in rental space on the twelfth floor of the Heckscher Building, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Seventh Street.

\textsuperscript{85} Marsh stopped going to Harlem in 1934, one year before he also took an artistic hiatus from transportation subjects. For information on Harlem as a leisure destination for white New Yorkers and Marsh’s presentation of Harlem sites in his art, see Carmenita Higginbotham, “At the Savoy: Reginald Marsh and the Art of Slumming,” \textit{Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts} 82, nos. 1 and 2 (2008): 16–29.

\textsuperscript{86} Marsh enrolled in anatomy classes again in 1934 at Cornell University Medical College on the Upper East Side.
INSIDE MARSH’S JOKES

Edward Laning (1906–1981), fellow artist and friend, contributed an essay to an issue of Demcourier entirely devoted to Marsh. Laning commented on Marsh’s art having evolved “within the matrix of journalistic art,” and explained the way his friend’s proficiency in commercial images gave Marsh an acute sensitivity toward his physical surroundings. Marsh honed his satiric and reportorial skills as a cartoonist and editor for the Yale Record. Two years of freelance assignments led to a staff position at the New York Daily News, a relatively young tabloid that quickly ascended to the top of the American print media food chain. There, from 1922 to 1925, he contributed a weekly cartoon column devoted to burlesque and vaudeville, as well as frequent single-frame comics poking fun at the daily frustrations of city life. As a

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87 Edward Laning, “Reginald Marsh,” Demcourier 13, no. 4 (June 1943): 5, 7. Laning revisited this link between Marsh and illustration in a 1955 article in which he explained that Marsh, “worked close to the boundary between ‘commercial’ and ‘fine’ art,” and that his work was easily accepted and praised because on the surface, it was entertaining; see “Through the Eyes of Marsh,” 22–24. Lewis Mumford, writing for the New Yorker in 1933, listed Marsh as the inheritor of an American illustration tradition that he traced from Winslow Homer and artists who worked for Harper’s Weekly in the nineteenth century, to Sloan and his colleagues at The Masses in the twentieth century—all of who used contemporary life as their subjects. Carlyle Burrows, art critic for the New York Tribune, suggested that Marsh’s realism would be used as a historical record the way Sloan’s early twentieth-century cityscapes or Currier and Ives prints preserved the nineteenth century; both clippings from Marsh Papers, scrapbook 1. Higginbotham aptly summarizes the crucial role commercial endeavors played in Marsh’s mature career: “Illustration, Marsh’s most consistent form of art, informed many of his modes of representation, and when he actively pursued a career in painting, Marsh habitually reworked graphic compositions from the Daily News that had provided him with such financial and public success,” Higginbotham, “At the Savoy,” 68n15.


89 In the five years Marsh worked as a staff artist, the Daily News’s circulation grew from four hundred thousand to over one million. His recurring series included Subway Sunbeams, Bunk, Little Ironies of Life, and People We’d Like to Kill But Don’t. Marsh estimated he produced four thousand drawings for the paper; Marsh, “Let’s Get Back to Painting,” 293. Marsh’s scrapbooks contain hundreds of examples of
cartoonist, Marsh relied on his ability to present recognizable scenes paired with pithy commentary on New York idiosyncrasies. His attention to urban demographics was an asset for developing cartoon ideas for the *New York Daily News*, the *New Yorker*, and other publications. He reduced the urban milieu into a select number of character types (the bum, the businessman, the spinster, the starlet). Some of the *New York Daily News* cartoons are clearly intended as generic laughs, others are more of an “inside” observation of social practices.

Marsh avoided divisive political statements in his commercial works. When his observations dealt with social tensions, he used caricature to mitigate any pointed offense. *Subway Sunbeams* used the transportation system as the butt of the joke (fig. 1.2). The unique experience of waiting and traveling with a full range of races, ages, religions, and professions is shown in *The Melting Pot* and *Catching the Bronx Express*. The series’ title was part of the

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92 Other examples of Marsh’s humorous perspective on the crowded conditions of New York City’s public transit include: *Being Elevated* where the open-air benefits of an el train are overpowered by the hordes of travelers pressed into a train’s gated terminus; *The Subway Crush* which also shows a mob being crammed into a waiting vehicle (the accompanying text is illegible); *Let ’em go! Let ’em go!* where a man carrying a suitcase struggles to disembark as a wave of people board. Ann Douglas explains the one-liner cartoon debuted at the *New Yorker* as another manifestation of its founder’s belief that “everything is expressible” if one uses the proper phrase; “White Manhattan in the Age of Terrible Honesty,” in *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 35–6. Higginbotham discusses the arrangement of figures in *The Melting Pot* as reinforcing racial hierarchy; see “Saturday Night at the Savoy: Blackness and the Urban Spectacle in the Art of Reginald Marsh,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2005), 66.
Jest—his underground subjects traversed through sunless tunnels. Marsh’s humorous views of crowded platforms and railcars were intended to brighten a dull commute. *Subway Sunbeams* shares a similar title with a long-running series of advertisements produced by the transit companies; *The Subway Sun* was a marketing campaign started in the early twentieth century and revived in 1946. The overhead signage was a corporate attempt to enlighten, or illuminate the tunnels criticized for their dark, raucous atmosphere.

Marsh presented a transit antagonist in several frames from another series, *People We’d Like to Kill But Don’t*. He depicted moments of ire directed at a person whose futile attempts to dash through a subway car’s closing doors results in a delay, or a tall man who stretches his lower limbs across a public vehicle’s central aisle. In *Taking the Chambers Street Curve* Marsh captured the range of interpersonal blunders caused by a sharp turn (likely on the Sixth Avenue el or possibly the IRT Seventh Avenue Line). The seated man on the left receives a hand to his face and a bewildered fellow traveler on his lap. Centrifugal forces push ladies into strangers and test the strength of those lucky enough to grip an overhead strap or pole. A final example (one

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that has not lost its humor over time) is Marsh’s rendition of passengers struggling to decipher the tinny announcements through the speakers in *A Voice from the Blue*.

Just as Daumier’s transit motifs amused French newspaper audiences, Marsh’s 1920s illustrations made jokes about social taboos and unspoken codes of etiquette. His cartoons demonstrate recognition that public transit spaces provided a perfect stage to represent modern American sexual and racial interactions. His early published images support the argument that Marsh had a lifelong interest in the character type of sexy women travelling in the city (the distraction, or lack thereof, caused by a buxom female passenger, or a woman’s undivided attention to her reading material).

**NEW YORK CITY AS AMERICAN AND MARSH AS A REGIONALIST**

In an early summary of the American Scene in visual art, E. M. Benson was underwhelmed by Marsh’s transportation scenes. Benson’s February 1934 article commended the artist’s choice of a subject that was previously considered artistically insufficient, but concluded, “his is primarily epidermal art. He sees the passing scene but seldom succeeds in making a comment about it that indicates he has caught its real aesthetic or human significance.”94 In the elements that dissatisfied Benson, other authors saw Marsh as a propagator of Regionalist values. Lloyd Goodrich (1897–1987), the artist’s childhood friend and ardent supporter, presciently claimed that a November 1930 display of Marsh’s work avoided condescension, artiness, satire, and theory. Instead, Goodrich argued, the paintings represented the lofty ideal of authenticity.95

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95 Lloyd Goodrich, “November Exhibitions, Reginald Marsh,” *Arts*, November 1930, 124. Goodrich is another friend of Marsh who proved to be an influential figure in New York’s art circles. He was born in
Regionalist painters sought to visualize the nation in ways that were direct and recognizable without incorporating sentiment or politics. Author and critic Thomas Craven (1888–1969) advocated for native artists to spurn European influence and reject frivolous abstractions. He included Marsh in the roster of artists who created work that was rooted in lived experience and comprehensible by the masses.96 A 1934 *Time* magazine feature article on the status of American art solidified Marsh’s association with Regionalism.97 For many authors and audiences, Marsh’s representations of urban life avoided the unintelligible, abstract approaches that attracted many American artists in the decades following the Armory Show (International Exhibition of Modern Art, 1913).

Along with those of Thomas Hart Benton, John Stuart Curry, Grant Wood, and others, Marsh’s “native” origins and distinctive style became admirable. Prized traits of a successful Regionalist artwork were objectivity, typicality, realism, and legibility. By carefully picturing the diversity, grime, discomfort, tedium, and textual miscellany associated with urban travel, Marsh contributed to the body of work Goodrich, Craven, and others lauded as authentically American.

The relationship between New York City and the rest of the United States has been a long-standing source of debate and informs our understanding of Marsh’s work as part of the American Scene. In a fiery editorial for *Scribner’s Magazine*, Earl Sparling reluctantly confirmed that the city must be viewed as “the mirror in which America, after half a century of

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confusion, suddenly sees herself for what she is.”\textsuperscript{98} As his evidence, Sparling enumerated the interregional origins of the city’s professional and cultural leaders. Despite his repulsion at New York’s grime and greed, he warned readers that the city represented the country’s aspirations:

> It is smoke and steel and power and money. It is the tradesman’s paradise. It is what every town in America, Western and Southern, wants to become. It is a culmination of what began with Grant and ended in Harding. It is greed made grand, a thousand accents gathered from the ends of the earth to make factory fodder and dividends. It is capital of the next thousand years, and is unutterably cheap.\textsuperscript{99}

Sparling’s contradictory paean to New York as the pinnacle of flawed American values offers insight into the ways audiences outside of the city perceived Marsh’s urban scenes. While New Yorkers may have commiserated over the disheveled state of their public transportation, transit settings, particularly subways and els, represented the national achievement of quick, inexpensive, modern mobility for the masses—infrastructure only available in the world’s largest cities.\textsuperscript{100}

From his early cartoons produced for mass consumption, we see Marsh’s interest in commonplace scenes that resonated with viewers. Transit spaces offered an ideal setting in which to arrange figures and objects that were identifiable by a broad public and did not need additional narrative. As Marsh gained recognition for his work and ceased to rely on comic


\textsuperscript{100} The continuation of this comparison between New York City and the rest of the United States is visible in political rhetoric such as Senator Ted Cruz’s repeated use of the phrase “New York values” to summarize fellow presidential candidate Donald Trump’s ideological differences from conservatives in other parts of the country. In terms of transportation, the notion of cities and mass transit as entwined, and cities as more politically liberal, makes funding for public transportation projects a highly contentious government issue. Will Doig reported on a proposed Congressional bill to eliminate the Mass Transit Account in 2012; his summary illustrates the political ideas deeply entrenched into American mobility: “Defunding transit is how you smack down urbanites, environmentalists, and people of color, all in one fell swoop. It’s how you telegraph a disdain for all things European,” Doig, “The Tea Party’s War on Mass Transit,” \textit{Salon}, February 13, 2002, \url{http://www.salon.com/2012/02/13/the_tea_partys_war_on_mass_transit/}.
appeal or commercial witticisms, his interest in accuracy declined. His arrival at professional independence took place during the same years that his views of transportation became increasingly pastiche. The subway then became not only a nonspace in its position between locations, but also a dreamlike space where the grime and diversity faded away and the benches became a setting for idealized women to pose.

**INFLUENTIAL SCENES OF TRAVELERS**

Like that of Daumier, Marsh’s comic intent shines brightest in *The Subway Sun* and other commercial illustrations. In addition to William Hogarth, whose printmaking skills and social commentary also gained appreciation from twentieth-century Americans, Daumier’s name frequently appears in reviews of Marsh’s early career. The artist must have anticipated the comparisons by 1935, when he asked journalist Harry Saltpeter not to dub him the “American Daumier or Hogarth.”

Saltpeter’s observation that *The Third-Class Carriage* (c. 1862–64; fig. 0.6) was an obvious, but not shameful, source for Marsh’s *Second Avenue El* (1931) is equally applicable for several earlier works depicting a journey on the elevated train.

*The Third-Class Carriage* is painted on a canvas roughly two feet in height and three feet wide. The contents are arranged around a central vertical axis and a slightly raised cross axis. On

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102 Harry Saltpeter’s association between Marsh and his French predecessor noted, “Daumier may be the inspiration of [Marsh’s] *Second Avenue El*, but Marsh has no reason therefore not to be proud of it.” Elsewhere in the article Saltpeter recounted Marsh’s request, “Please don’t call me the modern Daumier or the modern Hogarth,” Saltpeter, “The Roar of the City,” 128. Curators Ilene Susan Fort and Michael Quick note the “‘obvious’ source for Marsh’s *Third Avenue El* (1931) is Daumier’s *The Third Class Carriage* (c. 1860–70) [sic], which Marsh would have known through ‘several widely available’ painted or lithograph versions,” *American Art: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 338. Both comparisons likely refer to the painting now known as *Third Avenue El* (1931, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.82.146), because Marsh recorded its title as “Second Avenue El” in his papers; Marsh Papers, scrapbook 1, clippings 1922–39, frame 36; scrapbook 4, clippings 1925–44, frame 18.

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the left, Daumier placed his primary figures (a nursing mother with a baby and young child seated next to an elderly grandmother) and two, small light filled windows. The amber glow shown on the exterior of the carriage highlights the two women’s faces as well as a handful of other passengers whose seats face our direction. Additional travelers farthest from our vantage point are seen only as dim profiles or shadowed heads. The dim sunlight falling through the windows and demarcating faces on the left side of the canvas does not carry over into the right portion. The right side of the canvas is almost entirely dark, ruddy brown and devoid of identifiable forms. The foremost bench is shared by a young boy napping in the shadow of the elder of the two women. A lone parcel sits to his side, in the lower right corner of the scene. A horizontal division, created by the upper edge of the bench, separates the women and children in the foreground from the rest of the carriage. The central vertical axis falls between the elderly matron on the left, and the bulky, rounded head and shoulders of a man on the right. Overhead, the upper portion of the picture is entirely dark, with brown arches marking the recession of the train’s roof.

Today craquelure covers most of the surface of The Third-Class Carriage, though the aged texture dissipates on the left where unpainted passages bare traces of pencil that extend across the canvas and evince the work’s unfinished state. The underlying graphite grid is most visible in the two female figures occupying the lower left quadrant. Daumier’s expert draughtsmanship is shown through the curving contours of these women; single lines denote their faces, clothing, and hands. Their foreground position, illuminated features, and large scale dominate the scene.

A comparison of *The Third-Class Carriage* with Marsh’s *The El* (c. 1928; fig. 1.3) suggests Daumier’s approach to transit motifs resonated with Marsh from the beginning of his painting career. Daumier’s two matronly travelers are mirrored and updated in Marsh’s 1928 railcar. If *The El* were flipped and viewed in reverse (fig. 1.4), the New York commuter scene offers striking similarities with *The Third-Class Carriage*’s composition. Marsh featured two women, a bronze-skinned brunette seated by the window, and a dainty, Anglo-fashionista positioned in the aisle seat and engaged with a book on her lap. As in Daumier’s scene, the foreground figures occupy nearly half the picture plane. Unlike French trains during the previous century, the elevated’s seats did not extend the full width of the vehicle and thus Marsh’s duo does not share the bench with additional figures.\(^{104}\) The dark wood flooring and shadowed green edge of the back-to-back benches constitutes the lower portion of Marsh’s canvas. Two additional elements suggest Marsh was familiar with Daumier’s work. Both views show linear perspective in the placement of windows and the diagonals created by their borders. They also both include a vertical axis extending between the central, foreground woman and the male passenger behind her.\(^{105}\)

Another influence on Marsh’s depictions of travelers may have been two artists with whom he worked closely in New York City. In 1926, the same year Marsh enrolled in classes under John Sloan (1871–1951) at the Art Students League, Sloan produced two etchings of

\(^{104}\) For a discussion of seating arrangements aboard trains, the antecedent of urban railcars, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, “The Compartment,” in *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986), 70–88.

\(^{105}\) Marsh produced several etchings incorporating this viewpoint and arrangement of elevated passengers. Each is titled *BMT* with a number designation assigned by Norman Sasowsky, author of a catalogue raisonné of Marsh’s prints. An intriguing alteration between the painted and etched versions of this scene is Marsh’s decision to remove the racial ambiguity of the woman seated by the window. The chronology of the etchings is explained in Norman Sasowsky, *The Prints of Reginald Marsh: An Essay and Definitive Catalog of His Linoleum Cuts, Etchings, Engravings, and Lithographs* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1976), cat. nos. 60–2.
women in the subway. *Subway Stairs* uses the subterranean setting as an opportunity to show a passenger’s skirt lifted by wind as she descends into a station. *Reading in the Subway* (1926; fig. 1.5) offers viewers a chance to partake in the depicted activity by reading the sign over the seated traveler’s right shoulder, “Rub with Sloan’s Liniment.” Beneath the encouraging motto, the advertisement contains a pair of hands that point downward toward the woman’s exposed lower limbs. Her legs are featured prominently in the center of the scene; their bright, unmarked surface contrasts with the shadowy terminus of the subway car and underside of the bench. The woman appears to travel alone, mentally occupied by the book held near her face. Although companionless, she shares the space with at least one other passenger; a mustachioed reflection is faintly visible in the upper right corner of the print. In its focus on a young, female passenger absorbed in a book and the inclusion of subtly ironic text, *Reading in the Subway*, introduces several of the aspects that went on to become standard ingredients in Marsh’s mobile settings.

A transformative shift in Marsh’s artistic career came when Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975) taught him how to mix and apply egg tempera paint. Its rapid drying time enabled Marsh to go back over underlayers without lengthy delays or unintended color transfers.\(^\text{106}\) Linear details and crisp boundaries became easier to achieve. The ability to superimpose distinct marks

\(^{106}\) Conservators and experts in Marsh’s unending experiments with media, Lance Mayer and Gay Myers provide a history of tempera paint in the United States as well as its appearance in Marsh’s oeuvre; Lance Mayer and Gay Myers, “Marsh’s Techniques: The Craft of Painting and the Secrets of the Old Masters,” in *Swing Time: Reginald Marsh and Thirties New York*, ed. Barbara Haskell (New York: New York Historical Society, 2012), 152–67. The painter expressed his own disappointment with his early oil paintings; Marsh, “Let’s Get Back to Painting,” 293. This self-criticism may have stemmed from Lewis Mumford’s derogatory assessment of Marsh’s technique as murky, vague, and smudgy; Mumford, [two untitled reviews], *New Yorker*, 1933 and 1934, found in *Marsh Papers*, scrapbook 1, clippings.
and produce a surface with high sheen appealed to Marsh. The tempera technique provided a means for him to adapt his journalistic draughtsmanship to professional painting.

Marsh enrolled in classes with Benton in 1929 as the elder artist was in the midst of preparing his America Today mural series for the boardroom of the New School of Social Research. After six months of creating clay models and sketches, Benton painted the nine panels of America Today in three months. Marsh benefited greatly from tutorials and demonstrations by Benton, as well as witnessing (and assisting) with Benton’s tour-de-force of contemporary American life. Transportation motifs were included throughout the mural cycle, but City Activities with Subway (1930–31; fig. 1.6) resonates with the mass transit passengers present in

107 Marsh continued to experiment with combinations of oil and tempera paint in individual works, and his quest for an ideal medium continued until his death. His ideal media would, “allow him to superimpose multiple thin, translucent layers of paint without muddying his underlayers.” Mayer and Myers, “Marsh’s Techniques,” 157.

108 The new building for the New School of Social Research opened in January 1930 at 66 West Twelfth Street. Marsh’s admiration for his instructor and America Today were likely reinforced by Goodrich, whose review of the mural for Arts magazine applauded Benton’s achievement: “These paintings give one the sensation like that of looking out of the window of a train speeding through cities, past factories and mines, through farmland and woods, over prairies, across rivers. They convey a sense of the restless, teeming, tumultuous life of this country, its wide range of contrasts, and its epic proportions... [Benton’s] design is as insistent as jazz or the beat of machinery, seeming in tune with the speed and emphasis of modern American life.” Reprinted in Henry Adams, “The New School Murals” in Thomas Hart Benton: An American Original (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 174–75. For details on the commission, completion, and reception of the mural, see Emily Braun and Thomas Branchick, Thomas Hart Benton: The America Today Murals (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1985); Adams, “The New School Murals,” 156–75; and “Thomas Hart Benton’s Mural America Today Comes to the Met”, MetCollects, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (September 3, 2014), http://www.metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/metcollects/america-today.

Marsh’s work at the time.\textsuperscript{110} \textit{City Activities with Subway} takes its name from the commuters shown on the lower right corner, two of whom were identifiable figures from Benton’s circle of acquaintances.\textsuperscript{111} A suit-wearing gentleman ogles the curves of a sexy, standing passenger. Her attention is diverted upward, as though reading the strip of overhead advertisements or peering into the adjacent scene of a boxing match. In the extreme foreground, placed on the border between subway interior and street corner, a bookie peruses a tabloid with stories about a “love nest.”\textsuperscript{112}

**MARSH’S SUBWAY FRIEZE**

Three Marsh illustrations appear on a two-page spread in the October 5, 1929 issue of the \textit{New Yorker} (fig. 1.7).\textsuperscript{113} The upper right corner contains a drawing of four figures, three men sleeping in various positions on a bench and a young newsboy perusing the back page of one of his wares. Without a background or detailed setting, the adolescent and slumbering trio may not qualify as a transportation scene, but the remaining two illustrations use the subway as an explicit setting. The untitled vignette on the upper left of the left-hand page shows a sparsely

\textsuperscript{110} Marsh’s approaches to transportation motifs are rarely as energetic or compositionally dramatic as Benton’s panel. The mass transit panel hung directly across from the largest (and only unpopulated) panel of the series, \textit{Instruments of Power}. Among Benton’s montage of mechanical inventions, improving transportation technology appeared in the forms of a train, plane, and dirigible. Henry Adams noted that the image of a train recurs throughout the series in all but two panels, for a total of nine trains; Adams, “The New School Murals,” 161.

\textsuperscript{111} Max Eastman, editor of \textit{The Masses}, sits in the foreground, shown in profile. Peggy Reynolds, recognizable burlesque dancer who performed at the Eighth Avenue Burlesque, posed as the standing straphanger. Erika Doss, \textit{Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 72, 83.

\textsuperscript{112} Various other New Yorkers populate the remainder of the scene. Several groups of figures are cast as audiences for the performances of burlesque, boxing, and a film. Other activities depicted to the left of the travelers are dancing, bootlegging, singing, and evangelizing.

\textsuperscript{113} The three images accompany a series of unrelated essays under the header, “Talk of the Town” (a section that continues to appear in the \textit{New Yorker}).

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populated Times Square subway platform. (I will refer to this image as *Times Square.*) In the middle ground, a woman uses her reflection in a gum machine to apply lipstick. To her right, in the lower right foreground, stands a man wearing a bowler hat and long coat; he is reading a newspaper. Along the far side of the tracks, three transit employees stand in the rail bed and use long-handled brushes to scrub the tiled walls.

The third illustration extends along the base of both pages; *Interborough Subway 3 A.M.* is a cutaway view of a single IRT rail car and its array of passengers (fig. 1.8). Like the central, primping figure in *Times Square*, Marsh’s *Interborough* illustration contains travelers and features that reappear in his paintings and etchings. In this array of late-night passengers are the women, matrons, bums, and joy-seekers that populate his urban views.

Couples canoodle at both ends of the car. Sleeping figures recline on benches and lean against partitions. Two men, positioned on opposite ends of the car, hold overhead straps and read newspapers. A large, heavily contoured police officer sits alert near the center of the vehicle. His head turns in the direction of a Navy man pinned by the closing doors in an attempt to join his fellow sailors. The doorway snafu diverts the policeman’s attention away from a boy darting toward the right; his target is represented as a leg cropped by the car’s doors, depicted mid-flight from the boy in pursuit.\(^{114}\)

Just behind the running youngster, a man reclines on the bench seat with his arm or folded paper acting as impromptu pillow. His legs are not visible behind fellow passengers but

\(^{114}\) When printed as a two-page scene, where readers’ eyes move from left to right, the boy’s diagonal gate and his target’s truncated limb activate the late night voyage into a demonstration of “the city that never sleeps.” The majority of Marsh’s transportation prints, paintings, and illustrations suggest stillness and delayed movement rather than forward motion. This is not true for many of his *Daily News* cartoons where the jostled passengers often find themselves in socially awkward positions, nor of *Penn Station* (lithograph, 1929) or the related painting, *Subway—14th Street* (1930) where crowds of commuters stream horizontally across the picture plane. Harry Saltpeter’s 1935 article promoted Marsh precisely because his pictures gave a sense of movement and sound. Saltpeter, “The Roar of the City,” 128.
his upper body implies he is fully prostrate on the bench. A second drowsing figure huddles by
the central doorway with his head propped up by the partition. His nearest seatmate holds a
similar pose—arms crossed and torso folded forward, though his disgruntled expression implies
his rest is postponed. On the right edge, another newspaper vendor leans against the inter-
compartment doorway. A subway guard faces away from the reader and scans the platform for
the culprit holding the doors ajar.

Marsh frequently included text as part of his illustrations, including *Times Square* and
*Interborough 3 A.M.*. In the former the foreground pillar bears the station name. The latter
contains a sign on the center of the left side of the car designating the route as “7th Ave Local-
137th St. Broadway.” To the left of this text, just above the top-hat of a well-dressed
gentleman, is a sheet containing the illustration’s only other legible script—“The Subway Sun.”
Marsh surely considered these words as both a nod to his earlier contributions to the *Daily News*,
as well as a familiar IRT publication.

**THINNING THE CROWDS OF URBAN COMMUTERS**

Marsh’s earliest efforts in non-commercial art were done in watercolor or etching;
subjects were inanimate city structures—its buildings, boats, and railroads. After time, his Art
Students League classes, paired with his ability to isolate figures or activities into meaningful
frames, led to over a decade of dedicated studies of the New York City travelers.

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115 Cohen comments on Marsh’s use of snippets of text in connection to his friendship with John Dos
Passos, who also used clips of information to describe contemporary life; Cohen, *Reginald Marsh’s New
York*, 2. Morris Dickstein makes a similar argument, that signs and text were a way for Marsh to depict
the visual onslaught of the urban environment; “The Urban Spectacle of Reginald Marsh,” in *Swing Time:*
2012), 101.
In two paintings completed prior to *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* Marsh continued to explore the possibilities of multi-figure arrangements within transit settings. Close examination of their compositions and significant details offers clues as to what aspects of mobile subjects appealed to the artist. *The Subway* and *Subway Express* offer clues as to what aspects of the setting and activity appealed to Marsh.

Unlike the angled arrangement of figures in receding space shown in Marsh’s *The El*, the interior of the car depicted in *The Subway* (c. 1930; fig. 1.9) eliminates linear perspective and adopts a lateral vantage point similar to *Interborough 3 A.M.*. The underground scene contains eight figures arranged along the area where an inward-facing bench terminates at a doorway. The passengers appear in three overlapping groups. Three adults and a small child stand on the far left. A tall woman dressed in brown holds an overhead strap and faces away from the viewer while the youth, wearing a bright red jumpsuit and white hat, turns her face outward to return our gaze. Obscured by the straphanger’s raised arm and the black-and-white vertical poles, a young blonde woman reads in the area near the doorway; a shorter, bespectacled grandmother stands in front of her holding the pole with a gloved hand. *The Subway*’s central grouping is a pair of men. An African-American laborer leans against the pole and gives an open-mouth smile to an unknown placard or person off the right edge. His body partially blocks the mustachioed businessman who shares the area. Finally, two passengers appear seated on the right side of the canvas: a man, whose torso and face are replaced by the open pages of the *New York Times*, and a middle-aged woman who holds tightly to the parcel or purse in her lap and stares directly ahead, giving no bodily suggestion that she acknowledges fellow passengers’ presence. Her
bright blue ensemble and white gloves act as a balancing inclusion of color to offset the child’s crimson outfit.116

Marsh’s Subway Express (1929; fig. 1.10) used the same interior positions as The Subway but reduced the number of figures and changed the orientation from horizontal to vertical.117 Subway Express contains four passengers, two of whom receive the bulk of viewer’s attention. The man on the left edge is almost entirely cropped out of the picture and the gentleman on the right is nearly obscured by shadow. His presence is signaled by the highlighted pages of his Yiddish newspaper. The remaining two figures are shown more completely than any of those riding Marsh’s 1928 subway. In Subway Express, as in both painted transit scenes from the previous year, an attractive young lady is shown immersed in reading material. As in The Subway, Marsh transcribed a corporate logo, but here he also preserved the woman’s literary interests by reproducing the bold black lettering “PEACOX DECLARED SANE” and “MAFIA, DEFIED, SHOOTS RICH,” with the Evening Graphic logo sandwiched between the headlines. She rests against the vertical partition shared by a standing black man on the right. The lighting, activity, and pose of this figure act as a foil to hers. He also represents a more naturalistic depiction of a black man compared to Marsh’s grinning central figure in The Subway. In its reduction of figures and omission of overt caricature, Subway Express foreshadows Why Not Use the ‘L’?.

Why Not Use the ‘L’? marked a turning point in Marsh’s career. The year it was painted, Marsh joined fellow American Scene artists represented by Frank K. M. Rehn Galleries, where

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116 Marsh carefully retained the iconic logo on the front section of the man’s newspaper. Other legible news banners in Marsh’s oeuvre include: the New York Daily News, the New York Times, the Daily Mirror, P.M., and Evening Graphic.

117 Subway Express is the only vertical format transportation painting by Marsh from 1928–31, but after 1932 he predominantly chose this orientation for his numerous depictions of solitary women in transit settings.
his November 1930 exhibition was the start of a series of shows and accolades. Why Not Use the ‘L’? was purchased by the Whitney Museum in 1931, the year the museum debuted. A clipping in one of his scrapbooks reports that Why Not Use the ‘L’? was the most popular painting on view at the museum’s opening. People crowded around it “finding philosophical implications in the title and the headline on the tabloid newspaper on the floor of the car, ‘Does sex urge explain Judge Crater’s strange disappearance?’”

The image of three subway passengers is a continuation of Marsh’s thematic interest and technical improvements. Here again, he focused on the juncture of bench and doorway and populated the vehicle with seated and standing figures. He refined his depicted cast to three passengers: two white women on the scene’s edges and a black man sleeping in the central canvas.

118 “Reginald Marsh: Rehn Galleries,” Art News, November 1, 1930, 12. Other artists whose work sold through Rehn include: Charles Burchfield, George Biddle, Edward Hopper, Kenneth Hayes Miller, Peggy Bacon, Peppino Mangravite, and Eugene Speicher. For a list of Marsh’s subsequent awards and achievements, see Haskell, “Swing Time,” 40.


120 As in Sloan’s Reading on the Subway, Marsh included the reflection of an additional figure; his bowler hat and shoulder are reflected in the far right window, just to the side of the seated woman. The demure, unoccupied woman seated in Why Not Use the ‘L’? is reminiscent of passengers shown in Marsh’s earlier transit scenes. The El, The Subway, and Subway Express contain a seated woman who, without the option of escaping into a literary accessory, stares intensely at unknown persons or objects. Two of the female passengers aboard Marsh’s The El are engrossed in this activity of looking—a white woman on the left who turns to peer out the window, and the foreground woman on the right, who looks back at us. Like the child’s outward gaze in The Subway, Marsh called attention to the etiquette of looking by presenting audiences with traveler’s ambivalent stares.
Unlike the black men who stand in *The Subway* and *Subway Express*, the figure anchoring the composition of *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* seems deflated. His large coat and slumped posture appear as a pile of curves amid the rail car’s straight lines. According to Higginbotham, the inclusion of black passengers aboard mass transportation was a strategy to emphasize a scene’s realism. The congestion of modern cities, particularly those in the northern U.S., weakened historical racial divisions and forced residents to adapt to diverse spaces.\(^1\)

The palette and tonal variation seen in *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* illustrate the significant impact of tempera paint on Marsh’s work. Bright colors and minute elements are especially noticeable in the textiles and typefaces. Tempera’s rapid permanence allowed him to capture crisp details in the signage and headlines as well as the seated woman’s embellished hat and neckline.

*Why Not Use the ‘L’?* takes its title from the encouraging poster in its background. For New Yorkers, the phrase would have recalled the marketing aimed at persuading them to support a particular transportation company or use their nickel fare to keep the elevateds operating while the subways expanded their terrain beneath the city. (When Marsh made the painting, the IND was under construction and would not open for another two years.) Experienced travelers might have noticed the sign, “EAST-18,” and understood the setting as an IRT Lexington Avenue train with a northern terminus at East 180th Street in the Bronx.\(^2\) The central script approximates the

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\(^1\) Higginbotham summarizes her argument on the way black figures advanced Marsh’s goals of authenticity and truthfulness in, “Saturday Night at the Savoy,” 59.

\(^2\) If the route indicates a probable sponsor for the titular poster, the responsible party remains unclear. This train traversed the same areas as the BMT’s Third Avenue elevated, but it also overlaps with the northern section of the IRT’s Ninth Avenue elevated which traced Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. Marsh rarely depicted a route sign in the interior of a transit vehicle. Apart from this inclusion in *Interborough 3 A.M.* and *Why Not Use the ‘L’?*, only one other painting, *New Lots Avenue Express* (1935), displays a legible route. He primarily incorporated script in the form of headlines or station markers as in *Times Square*. In two later paintings, *500,000 Czechs on Nazi Border* (1938) and *Times Square Subway* (1938),
language used on *The Subway Sun* car cards (and their corollary, the *Elevated Express*). These familiar features of transit environments used a standardized border featuring a company logo, volume and issue numbers, and a memorable tag line such as, “Ride the open air elevated,” or “Ride on the L and see New York.” In both the poster and route sign, Marsh took great care to duplicate the lettering from his source material. This attention to detail also appears in the Aunt Jemima advertisement hanging on the vertical partition, and the scandalous headline on the discarded newspaper at the bottom, center of the canvas.123

Each of the written elements of *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* functioned as authenticating devices for Marsh’s audiences.124 In his selection of recognizable texts that offered a variety of interpretive connections to the imagery, Marsh’s approach to *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* follows the examples set by Daumier’s *Interior of an Omnibus* (fig. 0.5) and Sloan’s *Reading in the Subway*

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123 On the racial implications of the Aunt Jemima advertisement, see Cohen, *Reginald Marsh’s New York*, 8, 13, and 33. For information on the embedded headline, see note 119 above.

124 Cohen argues that Marsh’s use of photography as source material and attention to transcribing headlines, signs, prices, placards, are evidence of his participation in the documentary ideology of the 1930s. These literal details are paired with imagined compositions, color palettes, and figural arrangements. In combining realistic and invented components to his urban scenes, Cohen concludes that Marsh intended to capture the invisible aspects of modern life—the mental and emotional experiences associated with the depicted activities. Cohen, *Reginald Marsh’s New York*, 11.
(fig. 1.5). All three works use transcribed words to insert subtle humor in otherwise mundane scenes.

**TEXTUAL ENCOUNTERS**

As shown in *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* and James Penney’s *Subway* (1932; fig. 0.1), artists strategically selected and placed references to contemporary news stories in order to achieve their individual goals. Headlines, such as the one featured atop the *Daily News* in *500,000 Czechs on Nazi Border* (1938; fig. 1.11), demonstrate the ways a distant conflict infiltrated the visual environment of Americans.125 Were the headline not included in Marsh’s painting, the only suggestion of conflict would be between the younger woman’s calm repose and the elder woman’s hustled descent. The lack of interest or anticipation shown by the standing woman could be explained by her acute knowledge of her train’s schedule, or her immersion in the printed pages. The descending woman’s turned face may be skimming the pages held aloft at the base of the stairs or gauging the distance of the approaching train.

When considered alongside *Hitler Escapes* (1939; fig. 1.12), another Marsh painting that takes its title from the embedded World War II account, the paintings suggest the artist was attracted to the transit setting as a “blank slate” on which he could superimpose wartime anxiety or other contemporary references. The text, “Hitler Escapes” is an accessory of a secondary figure as opposed to the central subject. The primary figure stands in the foreground, a purse held by her left arm while she adjusts her hair with her right. Both she and a nearby man stare down the tracks, presumably watching for signs of a train’s imminent arrival. Her fur wrap and arm partially block the newspaper held aloft by a figure behind her. The woman reading the

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125 The title of *500,000 Czechs on Nazi Border* actually differs slightly from the depicted headline, “500,000 Czechs on Nazi Front.”
newspaper stands awkwardly with her feet pointing away from the viewer and upper body turned in the direction of the anticipated train. Below “Hitler Escapes” the bold text continues, “as bomb kills aids.” An assassination attempt on November 8, 1939 killed six Nazi leaders but missed its primary target. For Marsh’s commuters, the event receives less attention than their anticipated departure.  

Marsh was not alone in his use of modern advertisements as a source of humor or irony in scenes of American mobility. Two printmakers working for New Deal arts programs in New York City used incongruent marketing to enhance their views of mobility during the Depression. In Albert Potter’s *Modern Music* (1933–36; fig. 1.13) a skeletal violinist and his female companion ask for charity aboard a crowded el train. *Modern Music* illustrates three forms of inscribed language. Along the right edge of the scene, Potter included two rectangles with the partial lettering of the train’s route. The print’s vertical axis is bracketed by two legible statements. Above the passengers, placards endorse ungracious products and call for patriotic donations. Four car cards hold legible script in the upper register of the vehicle. Reading from left to right (from the pictorially distant to near) the rectilinear placards announce a funeral.

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127 The precise location of these passengers is unknown, but the glowing cityscape and harbor in the window suggest they are likely aboard a Brooklyn elevated. The upper line of the route sign implies the train originated at a Times Square station.

company, silk panties, unemployment relief, and toilet paper. Above the upturned faces of the central, smiling infant and the wizened, gnarly musician, the block-lettering, “EMERGENCY UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF GIVE TILL IT HURTS.” Potter’s sign, a generic translation of many Depression-era calls for charitable giving, caps the central axis of his transit scene. At the base of the compositional line created by the man’s instrument, a headline composed of a first-person quote from the President suggests that both upper and lower texts “speak” for the federal government. The typeface statement, “I am All Right Says the President,” reassures viewers that despite the disquieting presence of poverty, the government (and country) is secure. For Potter, lettered passages became sites of humor and political criticism.

Fritz Eichenberg’s *Subway* (1934; fig. 1.14) focuses on the contrast between romance as a commercial incentive versus the despondent faces of a couple. His underground setting contains a late-night journey where passengers of various ages and races succumb to fatigue. A couple seated in the corner lean toward each other with downturned faces and closed eyes. Next to them sits a well-dressed black woman wearing white gloves, a pearl necklace, and a semi-translucent hat. Her head tilts back, her eyes are closed. To the right of her, a man bends forward with his elbows on his knees. His right arm is raised to support his head. His eyes are shadowed from the brim of his hat, but his open mouth hints that he is mid-slumber. The final pair of figures on the far bench is a mother and child. The toddler’s legs dangle over the edge of the bench and her torso lays collapsed onto her mother’s lap. The mother’s head and hat turned downward at the same angle as the slouched man’s. Her hand weighs down the string to a balloon that floats over her head. Its size and shape make the inflated souvenir into a

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129 The final word is obscured by the bow. My suggestion of “hurts” is based on the visible fragments of letters, but a shorter term may have been intended based on the minimal space available at the base of the placard.
continuation of the passengers’ oval heads. In the foreground, Eichenberg displayed his graphic and technical acumen by reversing the outlines and shadows used in upper portion of the image. Three figures sit on an unseen bench across from the six sleeping passengers. A man’s torso and head, a black silhouette contained by fine, curving, white lines, occupy the lower left corner of the composition. To his left, two women wear distinctive bonnets. One holds open a small book, perhaps a Bible. Her geometric hat, like the man in the foreground and the floating balloon, is an unmarked area of black with its contours shown in white. The repeating shape of an adjacent bonnet implies this woman traveled with a companion.

Within the scene, the lone pair of open eyes stare out of the advertisement posted on the car’s interior. The placard to “Invite Romance” appears above the despondent couple. The contrasting expressions of the advertisement’s model and female passenger resemble theatre masks—one smiling, the other sad—suggesting lived hardships and imagined happiness.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE—MARSH’S FEMALE PASSENGERS

The “character” of a woman reading clearly intrigued Marsh because she is included in the majority of his transportation scenes from the 1920s and 30s. More specifically, the woman standing in Why Not Use the ‘L’?, her ally perched in the background of The Subway, and their associates waiting in 500,000 Czechs and Hitler Escapes illustrate a pose that Marsh

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repeatedly presented as part of the “realistic” diorama beneath the streets of New York. The
figural repetition is easily recognized once the basic features of her pose are identified. She rests
her weight against a vertical support, leaving her legs at a slight angle. Her arms are raised to
hold a tabloid or book; her face tips downward as she internally processes the text.\footnote{A standing woman, resting against (or positioned next to) a vertical structure appears in the following works by Marsh: \textit{The Subway} (1930), \textit{Joan- The Tabloid} (1931), \textit{The Date} (1932), \textit{500,000 Czechs on Nazi Border} (1938), \textit{Hitler Escapes} (1939), \textit{Girl in Pink Suit} (1940), \textit{Daily News} (1944), and at least five unidentified paintings (dated c. 1940) known through photographs in the Museum of the City of New York. An equally intriguing presence along the Marsh’s subway platforms is women who pause to review their appearance in the reflective glass surface of a vending machine. An early example of this character appeared in the \textit{Times Square} illustration. Additional appearances include: \textit{BMT 14th Street} (1932), \textit{Joan- The Tabloid} (1931), \textit{Negress and White Woman in Subway} (1938), \textit{Subway 14th Street} (1930), \textit{Subway-Three Girls} (1928), and \textit{The Date} (1932). For confirmation that this is a gum machine, note the label “GUM” on the dispenser’s side in \textit{Girl in Pink Suit} (1940); this three letter identifier also appears in several of the unknown works from the Museum of the City of New York. An excellent example of this feminine transit routine appeared as a cover illustration, William Steig, \textit{Cover for Americana} 1, no. 2 (December 1932).} Whether
next to a station beam or within a train interior, the female figure’s curves contrast with the
adjacent vertical structure. While this figure is not the compositional linchpin in \textit{Why Not Use the ‘L’?} or \textit{The Subway}, she takes center stage in the 1938 and 1939 works. The seated version of
this literate muse is found in the central foreground of \textit{The El} and \textit{Subway Express}.\footnote{The seated variation of Marsh’s travelling muse is shown in: \textit{The El} (1928), \textit{Two Subway Girls} (1928), \textit{BMT #1}, \textit{BMT #2}, \textit{BMT #3} (all 1929), \textit{Subway Express} (1929), \textit{New Lots Express} (1934), \textit{Three People in the IRT Subway} (1934), and \textit{Hauptmann Must Die} (1935).} Over time, Marsh’s female travelers forgo their reading material and assume the regulated position without props suggestive of time or narrative. With each reapplication, the figure gradually ventures away from the “authenticity” appreciated by Craven, Goodrich and others. The women shown reading in Marsh’s works form the 1940s and 1950s hold literary materials as unused accessories. The diminishing mental activity of Marsh’s female travelers is particularly evident because of their highly consistent poses.
After producing numerous depictions of a lone female traveler standing alongside an architectural support in the 1930s, Marsh recycled the composition of Why Not Use the ‘L’? and included one of the female figures he had refined during the previous decade. Easter on the IRT (1941; fig. 1.15), a painting known only through a photograph in the artist’s notebooks, is a surprising remake of what was (and is) arguably one of his best known paintings. The pencil notation on the page containing the photograph provides the title, date, and lists Maroger medium. The scene approximates the IRT travelers shown in the 1930 painting; Marsh refined the components and simplified the details.

While the two women aboard Why Not Use the ‘L’? appear with accessories and expressions suggestive of their social status and personality, they are consolidated into an enigmatic mannequin standing on the left edge of Easter on the IRT. In her familiar pose, soft contours, and generic expression, the figure no longer provides reportorial details or Daumier’s satirical bite. For the final fifteen years of his career, Marsh populated his transportation scenes with these narrative foils—devoid of particularity and incapable of social, political, or psychological commentary.


134 Laning summarizes the character type of a ‘Marsh girl’ as, “unaffected and unreal—an automaton. . . This dea ex machina is Marsh’s girl, and in his boy’s world she walks serene while all those about her destroy themselves. She is the great white whale of Reginald Marsh’s myth of America. In the lonely crowd of his paintings and drawings, Marsh is saying, for all of us, ‘I’m a stranger here, myself.’” Laning, “Through the Eyes of Marsh,” 24. The idea of Marsh’s art growing increasingly repetitive is discussed in Thomas P. Bruhn, Reginald Marsh: Coney Island, 6. Higginbotham’s conclusion notes that in the final decade of his career, Marsh continued using his earlier subject matter—bums, burlesque. But he nearly stopped including African-American figures, a fact that she believes correlates to reviews of Marsh’s late works as imagined, nostalgic; Higginbotham, “Saturday Night at the Savoy,” 295. Baigell’s conclusion that Marsh’s 1930s paintings demonstrate an interest in humanity is acceptable but incomplete. It
Compositionally, *Easter on the IRT* uses a more distant vantage point than shown in the 1930 subway painting. We see the disconnected pair of passengers in their entirety; their spacious surroundings appear more like a stage set than a subway car. Windows, bars, seats, and dividers create a perpendicular framework separating the woman, man, and sign. The geometric stability belies any sensation of velocity or vibration. The sleeping man, presumably African-American, folds his arms, bends his waist and knees, and lies on the bench. Compared with the slumped figure in *Why Not Use the ‘L’?*, this man’s pose implies his nap was intentional. By depicting the reclined man from a lateral vantage point and showing his slumbering face, Marsh avoided caricature and emphasized repose.

The setting of *Why Not Use the ‘L’?* includes signage and advertisements as clues for possible interpretations or narratives; its title comes from the text written on a poster in the center of the upper edge. *Easter on the IRT*’s generalized figures and setting do not demonstrate Marsh’s interest in closely studied details or contemporary references. Neither advertisement’s truncated message allows us to determine the precise source material, but the recycled plaque no longer poses a rhetorical question. Marsh’s 1940 painting presents two contrasting characters in a familiar setting with no clear narrative. In effect, he reduced the transportation subjects into depictions of nonspaces inhabited by characters who are not fully fleshed out.

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135 The complete passage inscribed in *Easter on the IRT* reads, “NY Botanical Garden, EASTER, Brings a New Season of Bloom in the Conservatives. Open Daily 10-4:30, [FRBS].” The final four letters are unclear. If social commentary can be gleaned from *Easter on the IRT*, it may be the passengers’ isolation despite a holiday associated with family, or the inaccessibility of certain leisure activities to non-white Americans.
Figure 1.1
Reginald Marsh
*Why Not Use the ‘L’?*, 1930
Oil and tempera on canvas mounted on composition board
36 1/8 × 48 1/8 inches
Whitney Museum of American Art, 31.293
Figure 1.12
Reginald Marsh
Subway Sunbeams (four examples: Catching the Bronx Express, Concentration, Melting Pot, and Taking the Chambers Street Curve), c. 1922–25
Reproduced in the New York Daily News
Figure 1.3
Reginald Marsh
_The El_, c. 1928
Oil on canvas
30 x 40 inches
Whitney Museum of American Art, Felicia Meyer Marsh Bequest, 80.31.9
Figure 1.4
Comparison between:
Honoré Daumier
*The Third-Class Carriage*, c.1862–64
fig. 0.6

Reginald Marsh
*The El*, c. 1928
fig. 1.3
(digitally reversed)
Figure 1.5
John Sloan
*Reading in the Subway*, 1926
Etching
4 15/16 × 3 7/8 inches
Edition of 100
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, 26.30.159
Figure 1.6
Thomas Hart Benton
*City Activities with Subway from America Today*, 1930–31
Egg tempera with oil glazing over Permalba on a gesso ground on linen mounted to wood panels with a honeycomb interior
92 x 134 1/2 inches
One of ten panels
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of AXA Equitable, 2012.478b
Figure 1.7
Reginald Marsh
Three illustrations for the New Yorker, October 5, 1929, 20–21
[Times Square shown in upper left. Interborough Subway 3 A.M. shown at bottom.]
Figure 1.8
Reginald Marsh
*Interborough Subway 3 A.M.*
Illustration for the *New Yorker*, October 5, 1929, 20–21
Figure 1.9
Reginald Marsh
The Subway, c.1930
Oil and tempera on canvas
36 1/8 × 48 inches
Also known as People Seated and Standing in Subway
Whitney Museum of American Art, Felicia Meyer Marsh Bequest, 80.31.8
Figure 1.10
Reginald Marsh
*Subway Express*, 1929
Oil
39 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches
Also known as *Interborough Subway* and *Peacox Declared Sane*
Current location unknown
Color reproduction from Art in America 53, no. 4 (April 1965): 94
Figure 1.11
Reginald Marsh
500,000 Czechs on Nazi Border, 1938
Tempera on cradled Masonite
24 x 18 inches
Sale 2707, Lot 61 at Christie’s New York, American Art, May 23, 2013
Figure 1.12
Reginald Marsh
Hitler Escapes, 1939
Watercolor
40 x 26 inches
Current location unknown
Reginald Marsh Papers, album volume 4, folder 17, 1938–40, frame 9, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Figure 1.13
Albert Potter
Modern Music, 1933–36
Linoleum cut on paper
10 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches
Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Irving Potter, 1989.11.1
Figure 1.14
Fritz Eichenberg
The Subway, 1934
Wood engraving on paper
6 1/4 x 4 3/4 inches
Smithsonian American Art Museum, purchase, 1981.12.4
Figure 1.15
Reginald Marsh
*Easter on the IRT*, April 14, 1941
Maroger medium
15 x 18 inches
Current location unknown
Reginald Marsh Papers, Album volume 5, folder 21, 1940–44, frame 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Chapter Two

DON FREEMAN

What a stupendous eyeful! Here on these wide sidewalks an endless advancing multitude swept along in passionate pursuit of pleasure. The greatest wonder of all lay in the fact that every face was designed differently. No stock pattern had been used; each was original, created from the many nations that have made New York’s population. Feeling as if the whole pageant had been put on especially for me, I stood soaking up the stream of passing history.

—Don Freeman, 1949

Don Freeman (1908–1978) did not have Reginald Marsh’s connections to leading figures in the New York art scene, nor did he attain the urban Regionalist’s level of recognition. Freeman’s artistic career relied on entrepreneurial skills and commercial illustration. Freeman offered editors and patrons realistic views of New York City with a propensity toward sentimental, human interest subjects. His fondness of being “behind-the-scenes” befits the abundance of theatrical scenes in his oeuvre, but the concept of revealing the drama taking place off-stage also resonates with Freeman’s persistent attention to urban mobility. His works highlight the humor and drama present amid New York’s “advancing multitude.”¹³⁶ This chapter reveals that Freeman’s depictions of passengers emphasized a first-person experience by placing viewers in recognizable scenes and pairing visual works with written explanations or titular narratives. In addition, Freeman’s interest in reaching broad audiences through his self-published lithographic magazine encapsulates the parallel rise of mass media and mass transit during this period.

¹³⁶ He recounted his initial impressions of the city in his 1949 autobiography, *Come One, Come All!*. The book’s title reflects Freeman’s early career as an entertainer and his lifelong appreciation of theater; *Come One, Come All* (New York: Rinehart, 1949), 72–3.
Freeman arrived in New York City in 1928. As a teenager in California he read Robert Henri’s *The Art Spirit* and admired John Sloan’s work in his local museum.\(^{137}\) The twenty-year-old trumpet player arrived in New York City with the intention to use his musical skills to pay for classes with Sloan at the Art Students League.\(^ {138}\) Like his Ashcan School icons and their American Scene progeny, Freeman believed art should portray common citizens and contemporary life. For nearly two decades, he resided in New York City and focused his artistic attentions on the often overlooked activities of the lower classes.

Multiple types of transportation appear in Freeman’s work, especially in his prints and paintings from the 1930s and 1940s, when he resided in Manhattan.\(^ {139}\) This chapter summarizes Freeman’s trajectories during these decades and uses his addresses, biography, and artwork to refine the geographic and historic context for his representations of mobility. His decisions to disseminate his work as a self-published periodical, *Newsstand*, and to describe the magazine as “One Man’s Manhattan” highlight the value he placed on art as a means of relaying personal experiences to a broad audience. This form of distribution also suggests he considered transit

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\(^{138}\) In his Archives of American Art interview with Betty Hoag McGlynn, Freeman recalled seeing a painting by Sloan (1871–1951) at the San Diego Museum of Art. Sloan’s *Italian Procession, New York* (1913–25) entered the San Diego Museum of Art collection in 1926; see *Oral history interview with Don Freeman, 1965 June 4*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. He arrived in the city via a generous driver who picked up Freeman as a hitchhiker in Indianapolis and delivered him to the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Freeman, *Come One, Come All!,* 65. The Art Students League attracted students based on its impressive roster of instructors as well as its less stringent enrollment process. No entrance exams or transcripts were required. Freeman and his fellow students paid tuition on a monthly basis and could take off periods of time when income was scarce.

\(^{139}\) For scenes of urban commuters, Freeman’s prints demonstrate an impressive range of transportation types and spaces. In addition to the large number of works containing figures aboard New York’s light rail lines, he made images of traffic policemen, political campaign tours, parking woes, sightseeing buses, car salesmen, tow trucks, and Central Park carriage drivers. Employees of transit lines appear scrubbing station walls, digging tunnels, and facing off with unruly customers. Freeman’s passengers include mothers with children, delivery boys, buskers, bums, and gangsters. In the 1950s he continued to depict the commuting conditions along Los Angeles freeways and aboard San Francisco streetcars.
images as representations of, and objects for, mobility. By publishing his urban views as a magazine, Freeman made his work accessible to subscribers who may not have been able to afford the price of a single print or painting. Though much of Freeman’s artistic output offers entertainment and comic relief, *Newsstand*’s lithographs and written commentary provoked empathetic responses by highlighting the struggles and accomplishments of representatives of the urban lower classes.

Scholarly omission of Freeman from surveys of American art likely results from his incongruence with the primary movements of the period. His work shares the subject matter, but not the political aggression of the Social Realists.\(^\text{140}\) As noted in his *New York Times* obituary, Freeman’s published cartoons did not overtly call for reform or political change.\(^\text{141}\) His use of written puns and humorous details may have been typical of cartoonists of the time, but Freeman never penned a serial comic.

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\(^{140}\) Although less harsh in tone, Freeman’s subject matter shares Social Realist interests in inequality and corruption. He consistently depicted figures and environments that drew attention to discrimination and extreme poverty. However, unlike his peers who used their work to promote political change, Freeman’s intent might be characterized as sanitized humanism. He captured playful, cheerful moments within financially destitute communities. He was aware that his enthusiasm for the city did not correspond to the political battles and economic protests waged by other artists. In *Come One, Come All*, it is his laundryman, Mr. Lebrun, who dismisses Freeman’s art as naïve because it ignores the unpleasant consequences of corrupt governance. The book culminates with Mr. Lebrun’s selection of an artwork that meets his standards of social awareness, but the watercolor of a woman selling gum at the entrance to an el was painted by Lydia Cooley (1906–1998), Freeman’s wife. Freeman credited Mr. Lebrun’s assessment as the catalyst for the politically engaged images Freeman produced in the mid-1930s. Examples of *Newsstand* illustrations that deal with political topics include: *Campaign News* (*Newsstand* 01, September 1936), *That Fiorello Fellow* (*Newsstand* 02, December 1936 and reprinted in *Newsstand* 05, November 1937), *Sit Downer Gets Up* (*Newsstand* 03, March 1937), the cover illustration showing Mayor La Guardia boxing a Tammany tiger (*Newsstand* 05, November 1937), and *Loss of WPA Aids Saddens Boys* (*Newsstand* 09, August 1939).

\(^{141}\) Barbara Bader’s description of Freeman’s style noted, “[He] was not a cartoonist in the *Punch/New Yorker* or the editorial-page sense, not a wit or a rager—he was an artist-reporter in the line of Daumier, John Sloan, William Gropper,” Bader, “Child of the Theater,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1978, BR7.
He eschewed the Renaissance and Baroque masters who influenced Kenneth Hayes Miller (1876–1952) and the Fourteenth Street School artists and instead preferred to study the work of his peers and instructors—Henri, Sloan, Adolf Dehn (1895–1968), Jerome Myers (1867–1940), and Beaufort Delaney (1901–1979). Compared to those of his contemporaries, Freeman’s approach closely resembles that of Sloan, who became his teacher, friend, and supporter. As demonstrated by the self-referential “Sloan’s Liniment” advertisement above the woman in Reading in the Subway (1926; fig. 1.5), Sloan embraced the potential humor in his own subjects.

In addition to his Art Students League instructors and peers, Freeman greatly admired Honoré Daumier (1808–1879); he owned catalogues of Daumier’s work and made studies of his paintings and prints in New York collections. After first seeing the streets of New York, Freeman flatly stated his artistic aspirations: “What this city needs is a Daumier!” Like the French printmaker, Freeman appreciated the gestural, immediate quality of lithography. Freeman empathized with those who struggled to find adequate income, and he portrayed vulnerable citizens with respect and dignity. He also saw the ethnic diversity of lower classes as novel and vibrant—the same qualities he prized in the city as a whole.

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142 Freeman devoted two pages to Sloan in Newsstand 12 (April 1941). The short essay extolled the elder artist’s achievements as a teacher and his support of The Society of Independent Artists. A smaller portrait of Sloan also appeared on the frontispiece of Newsstand 01 (September 1936).

143 Freeman, Come One, Come All!, 66. Edith McCulloch introduces her catalogue raisonné on Freeman by describing his goal to “record the human scene” in the same tradition as Daumier, Hogarth, John Leech, and George Cruikshank; McCulloch, The Prints of Don Freeman: A Catalogue Raisonné (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 1.

144 Freeman elaborated on the range of activities he wanted to record: “I had to keep drawing so as to let the world know what wonderful people I had come across—not only the way they looked, but the way they invented lives for themselves out of nothing; carrying signs, fishing for change through sidewalk gratings, shining shoes, peddling gardenias, selling corsets, plugging hit songs, washing windows, sharpening knives,” Freeman, Come One, Come All!, 84.
Playing trumpet offered Freeman ample travel opportunities within the greater New York territory.\(^{145}\) His earliest known address in the city was on the southern edge of Brooklyn, but he soon found lodging near Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village.\(^{146}\) (For a map of lower Manhattan, see Appendix A.) At some point before 1933, he and his wife, fellow artist Lydia Cooley, relocated to an apartment on West Fifty-Third Street in Hell’s Kitchen. This apartment was near Central Park, the Art Students League, and contemporary American art galleries. In 1933 they moved to the location that would be their home for the next seven years, 219 West Fourteenth Street.\(^{147}\) Located on the northern edge of Greenwich Village and less than three

\(^{145}\) While other American Scene artists based in New York City exploited the aesthetic possibilities of Union Square, Greenwich Village, and the Bowery, and occasionally ventured to the nightclubs of Harlem and the beaches of Coney Island, Freeman expanded both his travel time and geographic terrain to Queens, the Bronx, and Spanish Harlem.

\(^{146}\) Early in his Manhattan residency, Freeman secured a regular weekend job playing at El Gaucho, a nightclub in Greenwich Village (245 Sullivan Street). He also frequented the Greenwich Settlement House (46 Barrow Street) for breakfasts and weekend meals. This is where he became acquainted with Amelia Earhart, who drove him to the Art Students League when he saved enough money to begin classes. Freeman, *Come One, Come All!* 125–126.

\(^{147}\) Roy Freeman’s list of addresses for his father (compiled from his father’s papers and records retrieved from the Art Students League) includes a YMCA in Norwalk, Connecticut (1928), 115 West Sixteenth Street (December 1928), 55 West Fifty-Third Street (unspecified dates), 219 West Fourteenth Street (1933–1940), 301 West Fifty-Ninth Street (1940–1941), 11 Columbus Circle (1942), 18 Jones Street (1943–1944, while Freeman was stationed at Camp Gruber), and 1635 Garden Street (as of 1948). In *Come One, Come All!* Freeman described some of his most memorable residences, but he does not include addresses or dates. Specifically, the book omits the 214 West Fourteenth Street apartment where he lived for seven years. As Fourteenth Street was considered the northern border of Greenwich Village, it is possible that further research could confirm that Freeman’s numerous references to living “in the Village” pertained to his Fourteenth Street abode, as well as the rentals near Sheridan Square. Freeman’s autobiography refers to “studios” but does not specify if these rooms served as both homes and workspaces. I chose to treat each address as a possible dual-purpose apartment/studio, but this may be inaccurate. For example, *A Map of Columbus Circle, New York* (*Newsstand* 13, July 1941) contains an arrow designating “My Studio” in a building other than the site where he depicts himself in the scene. There were likely a few additional apartments that do not appear on the above list. Other locations where he stayed in the city include: a room in Greenwich Village, near Sheridan Square (accessible from the Sheridan/Christopher Street IRT station). After leaving his “room in the Village,” (presumably the room near Sheridan Square), he spent short periods of time at 55 West Fifty-Third
blocks west of Union Square, the apartment sat amid an area popular for its artists, bargain retail, and political demonstrations. The nearest subway was the IRT’s Seventh Avenue Line, which stretched from New Lots Avenue in Brooklyn to 242nd Street in the Bronx, traced Seventh Avenue across southern Manhattan, and then cut under Broadway for all stations north of Seventy-Second Street. This train provided easy transport to the Art Students League (on Fifty-Ninth Street), or the offices of the Federal Art Project, New York Herald Tribune, and New York Times (all within walking distance of Times Square). If destined for Brooklyn or Queens, Freeman could catch a BMT train from one of the Canarsie Line stations on Fourteenth Street. Equally convenient, the IND Eighth Avenue Line’s Fourteenth Street station (opened September 10, 1932) was one stop north of Washington Square and traveled southward beneath Fulton Avenue in Brooklyn, or eastward into the central Bronx and Queens.

Street, MacDougal Alley (a half block north of Washington Square) and a loft over a garage on West Fifty-Second Street. These relocations culminated in a fourth-story apartment overlooking Columbus Circle. This abode likely corresponds to 301 West Fifty-Ninth Street, where he and Lydia moved in 1940. In Come One, Come All! however, the “moving months” and resettlement on Columbus Circle occur prior to Lydia’s 1931 arrival in New York City.

The IRT Seventh Avenue Line tunneled beneath a broad spectrum of New York’s neighborhoods: Wall Street, Lower West Side, Greenwich Village, Garment District, Hell’s Kitchen, Manhattanville, Morningside Heights (known for its hospitals and universities), Washington Heights (primarily Jewish), Inwood (primarily Irish), and the northernmost neighborhood, Marble Hill (which is separated from Inwood by manmade waterway so it appears to be part of Bronx).

He visited the Herald Tribune offices weekly starting in 1931 to submit theater illustrations for the editor’s approval. He became a regular contributor to the theater sections of the New York Times and New York Times Magazine in 1937.

By the time the IND’s Sixth Avenue Line shuttled passengers between Washington Square and Fifty-Seventh Street in December 1940, Freeman moved from his Fourteenth Street apartment to Columbus Circle.
Mass Transportation, Mass Communication

Freeman’s experience of New York City was almost entirely in the context of the Depression. Like other struggling artists, he applied for federal relief opportunities and his employment record matches the vicissitudes of New Deal funding. Between January and June 1934, Freeman joined hundreds of other artists as an employee of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). He spent the following twenty months as a freelance illustrator and returned to government employment in January 1936, this time for the Federal Art Project’s (FAP) Graphic Arts Division. Before he left the program in August the same year, Freeman contributed six lithographs to the estimated total of 11,285 prints produced by the Division.151 Like his independent artworks, his New Deal prints celebrated the urban pageant that Freeman embraced when he arrived in New York seven years earlier. Of his PWAP/FAP lithographs, Freedom of the Press (1936; fig. 2.1) is the only piece set within a transit vehicle.152

Shown from a vantage point near the middle of a subway car, Freedom of the Press places viewers in a standing position observing one end of the vehicle. A route sign on the left

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151 The Graphic Arts Division, sometimes called the Poster Division, was responsible for 250,000 impressions from an estimated 11,285 lithographic stones, wood blocks, and etching plates. In addition, the group produced two million silkscreened posters made from 35,000 designs. Freeman was one of approximately two hundred and fifty artists who were employed by the sub-division in all. Freeman completed a total of eleven lithographs for the PWAP, all dated 1934. The following eleven lithographs were released in editions of fifty: Show Time (Saturday Night), N.R.A. Parade, Automat Aristocrat, Wedding Bureau, Municipal Building, New York, Election Night, Times Square, and Icy Street. The following six lithographs were released in editions of ten: Late Editions (Alternate Vendors), False Alarm, Garment District, Ladies of the Evening, and Added Attraction (Blizzard on Broadway II). The following six lithographs were funded by the FAP in 1936 and issued in editions of twenty-five (plus three artist’s proofs): Washington Square Park (Family Circle), Dress Up Day, Home Relief Station, Freedom of the Press, Money Magnet, and School’s Out.

152 According to Freeman’s Archives of American Art interview, he completed the lithograph shortly after the painting of the same title (oil on canvas board, 24 x 28 inches, sold by Bonhams in November 2008, location unknown); see Oral history interview with Don Freeman, 1965 June 4, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. In addition to the FAP edition of twenty-five impressions, it was subsequently reproduced in Newsstand 03 (March 1937) and Freeman, Come One, Come All!, 102–3.
reveals the train is an IRT Seventh Avenue Express terminating at New Lots Avenue (Brooklyn). The abundance of printed pages visually dominates the setting. Only three of the dozen depicted figures are not actively reading. On the right, two men engage in a contentious conversation and a child cries in its guardian’s lap in the foreground. Among the remaining passengers, newspapers and reading material proliferate. For those not in possession of their own printed pages, the news of a nearby traveler acts as a convenient substitute.

The central, curvaceous strap-hanger in *Freedom of the Press* resembles the attractive women featured in the representations of subways by Marsh or Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975). She stretches her right hand overhead to grasp a stiff handle as her left hand holds a folded newspaper at eye-level. A second fashionable woman stands behind the first and twists to glimpse the pages held aloft. The visual line created by the women’s gazes leads to a seated African-American man in the picture’s lower left corner. He leans toward the center of the car while balancing a wrapped package against his leg. His studious expression, accentuated by the pencil propped behind his right ear, is shown in profile. He peruses the headline on the verso of the central woman’s newspaper. Seated next to the delivery man is a woman reading the *Daily Worker*. Her paper is surreptitiously shared by the man to her left whose upright posture, suit,

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153 Similarly polished female figures act as the vertical axes in several of Freeman’s depictions of sidewalks along the Great White Way.

154 The headline on the central woman’s newspaper includes the letters “FRAN” which offers several possible connections to contemporary events. The lead story could refer to the German army’s occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936 or possibly General Francisco Franco’s leadership of the Nationalist army as it marched toward Madrid. Below the front page’s lettering is a small line drawing of a seated woman and another illustration on the lower left of the page. Freeman did not include the logo designating the news source, but the large illustrations were characteristic of popular tabloids rather than conservative business journals. The matronly passenger clutching her young child in the foreground peruses a journal topped by a partially legible (and thus indeterminate) banner, “2000 Batt.” For information on tabloids, see Maurice R. Davie, “The American Newspaper,” in *Problems of City Life: A Study in Urban Sociology* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1932), 511–62; and Aben Kandel, “A Tabloid a Day,” *Forum*, March 1927, 378–84.
hat, gloves, and cane suggest his affluent status conflicts with the paper’s Communist perspective. A nun wearing a dark veil and white wimple sits on the end of the bench; she faces downward and a slim, diagonal book edge is visible between foreground figures. The two men standing on the far side of the central women hold newspapers that obstruct the view of the vehicle’s end. The tall man closest to the center of the car faces away from the viewer reads a two-page spread topped by the words “Stocks and bonds.” He turns slightly to glower at the leftist *Daily Worker* and its readers. The second standing man holds the farthest visible position and reviews a paper with a headline written in Yiddish.

In their sheer diversity and proximity, the travelers populating *Freedom of the Press* signal an urban environment. Ceiling-mounted straps, parallel benches, overhead advertisements, and a central aisle identify the setting as a subway and redouble the scene’s urban associations. Viewers familiar with New York’s transit system could spot the IRT lettering and more likely identify with the passengers.

Freeman’s enthusiasm for New York’s mass transit systems as an optimal vantage point for the city’s “parade” made him, and many of his New Deal peers, inclined to use their commuting hours for sketching. For artists employed by various federally sponsored projects in the city, the procedures for submitting work, verifying hours, and receiving paychecks were

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155 A contemporaneous lithograph demonstrates Freeman’s use of depicted reading material as a source of irony. *Financial Times (Newsstand 01, September 1936)* shows an elderly, bearded man seated in an automat. His disheveled overcoat and unkempt appearance contrast with his mealtime perusal of the *Financial Times* (with the headline “STOCKS” emblazoned at the top).


157 Freeman opted for dime store notepads rather than more expensive, conspicuous sketchpads. In his opinion, art pads attracted gawkers. Freeman used small, leather-bound pads and mumbled numbers or words to himself to give the misimpression that his notebook contained equations or shopping lists. Freeman, *Come One, Come All*, 84.
complicated and inconvenient. Each morning, FAP artists throughout New York’s boroughs traversed waterways, railways, and avenues to check in at the main office (6 East Thirty-Ninth Street). They promptly returned to their homes, studios, or workshops and remained there for the entirety of each workday because a federal timekeeper could stop by unannounced.\textsuperscript{158} I propose that the FAP’s regimented schedule meant that transportation was one of the easiest subjects available to their artists. It was difficult to venture very far in search of new models, events, and subjects; preparatory studies could be made during the daily roundtrip.\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{158} Artists had to sign in every morning by nine o’clock and then return home (or to their designated worksite). They could not leave their studio because they risked being marked as absent if a timekeeper came by unannounced. These details are based on Jacob Kainen, “The Graphic Arts Division of the FAP,” in \textit{The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs}, ed. Francis V. O’Connor (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 170; and Mary Frankl Francey, “American Printmakers and the Federal Art Project,” \textit{Traditional Fine Arts Organization, Inc.}, October 8, 2008, \url{http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/8aa/8aa192.htm}. Mabel Dwight recounted the stressful timekeeping requirements: “[an artist friend] had to come into Manhattan from Staten Island each day to sign in and then go home to work. She was nearly half deaf and worried so that she would not hear her morning alarm clock that she sat up all night” see Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, \textit{New Deal for Art: The Government Art Projects of the 1930s with Examples from New York City and State} (Hamilton, NY: Brodock Press, 1977), 17n4. Other PWAP/FAP artists who produced images of mass transit during their federal employment include: Berenice Abbott, Ida Abelman, Carlos Anderson, Fred Becker, David Burke, Ruth Chaney, Beatrice Cuming (PWAP), Fritz Eichenberg (PWAP), Hendrick Glintenkamp (PWAP), Irving Guyer, Edgar Imler, Eli Jacobi, Nan Lurie, Jack Markow, William C. Palmer (PWAP), Albert Potter (PWAP), and Leonard Pytlak.

\textsuperscript{159} Four of the six lithographs Freeman produced for the FAP show outdoor, sidewalk settings (two are night scenes and the other two depict children frolicking after school). Aside from the subway setting of \textit{Freedom of the Press}, the other interior space Freeman represented in a FAP print was a make-shift office of a \textit{Home Relief Station}. Freeman also captured the sometimes contentious encounters between recipients and federal representatives in \textit{Home Relief Inspector Goes Visiting} (\textit{Newsstand} 14, October 1941). In \textit{Come One, Come All!} Freeman recalled the el as the best way to see people and observe New Yorkers. Regarding his elevated trips to music jobs, he explained: “Riding the elevated trains to and from the dance dates offered the best means of grasping the full size of the city and its perplexing, kaleidoscopic contrasts. As the train wound its snakelike way through the canyons of dismal tenements along the East Side, one could see the towering buildings of Wall Street rising like huge cash registers, each trying to outdo the other, all this in startling proximity to stark poverty. From the train windows it was possible to look into the tenement apartments bordering the El. Every manifestation of family life exhibited itself freely. What a show for five cents! The people in the small, stuffy rooms seemed to be immune to the relentless rattling of the passing trains and regarded their coming and going as calmly as they would regard the ebb and flow of the sea. Apparently they hardly cared that the El passengers stared at them or that an artists might be planning to use them as subjects for future paintings. For this was certainly my uninhibited intention,” Freeman, \textit{Come One, Come All!}, 81.
*Freedom of the Press* highlights the abundance of printed news media in the 1930s. Unlike Marsh’s inclusion of newspapers as physical barriers in several of his subterranean settings, *Freedom of the Press* offers a view of reading as a common, communal activity. The pages do not obscure the faces of their readers nor do they barricade figures from their cramped surroundings.¹⁶⁰ Each newspaper aboard Freeman’s commuter car heightens attention toward the subway as a space where diverse people and interests commingle.

New York City was a hub of journalism and competitive news sources in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Freeman regularly contributed illustrations to numerous commercial publications including the *New York Times*, *Herald Tribune*, *Stage*, *Fortune*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*. The choice of subject in *Freedom of the Press* demonstrates that the variety of residents and their corresponding reading preferences was part of what made New York City enthralling for the artist. The lithograph’s setting evidences Freeman’s keen attention to social behaviors aboard the public conveyance.

Freeman was not alone in his decision to show the proliferation of newsprint aboard subways. James Penney (1913–1984), a fellow student at the Art Students League, used the underground trains as the setting for two images of rush hour reading. *Subway* (1932; fig. 0.1) contains a headline in the central foreground—a placement similar to the newspapers featured along the lower edge of Marsh’s *Why Not Use the ‘L’*? (1930; fig. 1.1). In Penney’s lithograph, the *Daily Mirror*’s banner (“NOT MY BABY SAYS ROOSEVELT”) is the lone object rendered

¹⁶⁰ This interpretation counters the arguments made by communications scholar and photographer Hanno Hardt in *In the Company of Media*. His analysis of Marsh’s *Second Avenue El* (1930, etching) and *Why Not Use the ‘L’*? (1930) focuses on the ways newspapers “define the space and dictate relations of the people,” resulting in, “a distinct separation from the environment and a deliberate retreat into a personal world; the images portray the public as a collection of individuals engaged in their own private activities.” Hanno Hardt, “Gaze of the Artist: American Newspapers in an Urban Setting,” in *In the Company of Media: Cultural Constructions of Communication, 1920s–1930s*, Hanno Hardt, Bonnie Brennen, Matthew Killmeier (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 24.
clearly in the packed interior. Behind the broadside, heads and hats leave only the car’s ceiling, with its receding line of light bulbs and parallel strips of advertisements, visible above the throng of passengers. Unlike Freeman’s stable horizontal ground line in *Freedom of the Press*, Penney’s travelers tip precariously to the right. The off-kilter arrangement conveys agitation and compression.\(^{161}\) *Freedom of the Press* contains legible phrases specifying its temporal and geographical setting. Apart from the contextual information offered in the prominent headline, *Subway’s* claustrophobic interior denies viewers an opportunity to recognize or empathize with individuals. Penney’s congested scene presents the news as an additional strain on mental and physical capacities.

Penney revisited this subject in a collage made later that year. In *Subway—Interior* (1933; fig. 2.2), the faces, hats, and newsprint constitute the entire picture. Minimal architectural details denote the vehicular setting. The pasted newspaper pages’ rectilinear shapes mimic the hard contours of train poles, doorways, and signage.\(^ {162}\) This angular repetition is balanced by the curved edges of the passengers’ various styles of hats. In *Subway—Interior*, Penney eliminated the illusion of spatial depth by omitting scale or receding perspective. The flat surfaces enhance the feeling of compression shown in his earlier print. In comparison to Penney’s treatment of a subway motif, *Freedom of the Press* appears staged and spacious. Freeman placed his traveling

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\(^{161}\) The subway car’s slant is more unsettling when considered in relation to the grimacing figure pinched in the doorway on the left. If a traveler was still prying their way onto the car, the tilt could not be intended to communicate the train’s speed or motion. Letterio Calapai’s *Eight-Thirty Express* (woodcut, 1943) employs a similarly diagonal composition, but represented a kinetic moment. Calapai showed a packed transit container from an external vantage point which gives the impression that the rail car tips away from the viewer and plunges along a nerve-racking track.

\(^{162}\) This collage is particularly interesting in its inclusion of actual newsprint. As I have discussed, many artists chose to transcribe headlines and logos into their work. Penney’s *Subway—Interior* is a rare example of an American artist physically combining newspapers with representational scenes of travel. Discussions of newspaper as a material component in art appear in Judith Brodie, Sarah Boxer, Janine Mileaf, Christine Poggi, and Matthew Witkovsky, *Shock of the News* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2012).
figures in the middle ground and preserved open space in the foreground. While Penney’s commuters appear on the cusp of tumbling out of sight, Freeman’s newsreaders remain securely on display.

LEAVES FROM A GOTHAM SKETCHPAD

Freeman ended his time with the FAP Graphic Arts Division because he disagreed with their limited print editions; he envisioned his art for even larger audiences. Months later, in September 1936, he released the first issue of *Newsstand* as a sales method independent from galleries or commercial illustration. His decision to produce a one-man periodical should be situated in the context of similar, contemporary endeavors.

An early divergence from the evolution of the gallery system occurred in 1931 on the streets surrounding Freeman’s apartment in Greenwich Village. That year Freeman participated in the dawn of the annual Washington Square Outdoor Show (now the Washington Square Outdoor Exhibition), an unofficial gathering for New York artists to vend their wares around the Greenwich Village landmark. Freeman depicted the sidewalk sales in at least three works. The description alongside *Outdoor Art Show* (*Newsstand* 06, April 1938) noted that the exhibition offered abundant space and sunshine for no expense, but sales were far from lively.

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163 His displeasure with the limited edition numbers is noted in Marjorie P. Balge, “Don Freeman: A Critical Appreciation,” in *The Prints of Don Freeman: A Catalogue Raisonné*, ed. Edith McCulloch (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1988), 112; and McCulloch, *The Prints of Don Freeman*, 130. His PWAP prints were produced in editions of ten or fifty, and the FAP lithographs were released in editions of twenty-five. For *Newsstand* and his work for the Associated American Artists the size of the run was two hundred and fifty.

164 As explained earlier in this chapter, the exact dates when Freeman resided near Sheridan Square are not known. Even after he moved out of Greenwich Village, he remained a regular presence in the neighborhood because of his weekly performances at El Gaucho.

165 Freeman’s first completed work based on the show is *Art Club Market*, (lithograph, 1934) which he produced in two versions. The image was reused for the then-annual event’s advertisements and
In terms of his career trajectory, the critical feature of the Washington Square art events was their existence in a public thoroughfare. The shows foreshadowed the numerous federal relief efforts aimed at raising art’s visibility during the Great Depression, but unlike New Deal programs, the Washington Square Outdoor Show resulted from artists coordinating a means of increasing their audience and expanding patronage beyond elite collectors.

Freeman also witnessed several precursors to the proliferation of picture magazines during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{166} \textit{Americana}, a short-lived periodical helmed by Alexander King and Gilbert Seldes, appeared in February 1932 and seventeen issues followed before it folded in December 1933. The magazine’s scathing critiques and dark humor appeared on heavily illustrated pages with brief editorial essays. Like the sale of art on the sidewalks of Washington Square, the periodical was a response to the economic climate. \textit{Americana} featured cartoons, caricatures, editorials, and creative writing by artists including Sloan, Al Hirschfeld, George Grosz, Peggy Bacon, and e.e. cummings. Many of the magazine’s contributors went on to provide images for \textit{Newsstand} or receive the occasional mention in its pages. The biting tone and social criticism checklists in 1936. The work included in \textit{Newsstand} 06 (April 1938) presented the event from a closer perspective and the preceding page explained, “Free exhibit space on Washington Square gives artists a chance to expose their handiwork to the public and the sun. The sales are weak but the air is fresh.”


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displayed in *Americana* demonstrated the potential appeal for subjective commentary in visual form.\(^ {167}\)

In addition to these 1930s interventions into art and publishing arenas, New Deal programs bolstered visual artists’ income opportunities. Soon after the PWAP ended operations, a new commercial venture entered the art scene. The Associated American Artists (AAA) emerged from Reeves Lewenthal’s appealing offer to pay artists two hundred dollars for a print that he would then produce in an edition of two hundred and fifty. Freeman was one of thirty-six printmakers who participated in Lewenthal’s innovative marketing ploy its first year.\(^ {168}\) In October 1934, forty AAA prints appeared on department store shelves in fifty cities across the country. Each work was hand-signed and sold for five dollars.\(^ {169}\) The following January,

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\(^ {167}\) Four issues of *Americana* are in the Don Freeman papers at the Archives of American Art. These issues were donated in 1969 by Vernon Porter, then Director of the National Academy of Design. I am unsure if Porter’s submission of *Americana* was intended to be grouped with his loaned issues of *Newsstand*. No documentation explains their shared cataloguing as part of the Freeman papers. My suspicion is that Freeman was a contributor to *Americana*, or that Porter (who knew Freeman) associated the two publications based on method or time period. Additional information on *Americana* is available in Jane Van Nimmen, *Lightest Blues: Great Humor from the Thirties* (New York: Imago Imprint, 1984).

\(^ {168}\) The PWAP ended in June 1934 and according to the origin-story perpetuated by Lewenthal (1910–1987), he pitched his idea for AAA in July 1934. This was, coincidentally, optimal timing to persuade financially stressed artists. A few well-known artists received commissions through the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture (The Section) starting in October 1934, but Freeman and other aspiring printmakers did not hear optimistic news about work relief until the FAP was created in August 1935. Between his positions with the PWAP and FAP, the wages earned from the AAA supplemented his musical and commercial earnings.

\(^ {169}\) Freeman’s *Casting for Character* (1934) sold alongside works by Benton, Churchill Ettinger, Dehn, Gordon Grant, Luigi Lucioni, and Joseph Marguiles. He also sold *The Passing Show* (1941) through AAA. An index of AAA artists and artworks is available in the exhibition catalogue, Seaton, *Art for Every Home*, 2015. According to this list, Freeman was one of only twenty-five artists whose work was published both during AAA’s first year and again at a later date. In other words, eleven of the thirty-six artists involved with AAA in 1934 had no further dealings with the company. American Artists Group emerged in 1935 as a direct competitor to AAA. It too sold prints to the American masses at affordable prices ($2.75) but instead of emphasizing each print’s authenticity (through artist’s signatures) or rarity (through limited editions), the American Artists Group produced unlimited editions of unsigned works. Before the group
Lewenthal revised his original sales plan and released the first AAA mail-order catalog; the illustrated invitations appeared in mailboxes for the next five decades. The correlation between Freeman’s mail-order distribution of *Newsstand* and Lewenthal’s successful sale of prints to the middle class culminated in 1941, when AAA published four issues of Freeman’s one-man magazine.\(^{170}\)

Freeman produced twenty issues of *Newsstand* between 1936 and 1955; fourteen issues appeared before the end of 1941 and six additional *Newsstands* came between 1943 and 1955.\(^{171}\) (For a complete list of *Newsstand* issues, see Appendix C.) *Newsstand* was both a visual record of people in transit and a physical object intended for transport. Each issue connected to larger concerns about American mobility and was delivered to mailboxes, libraries, and private ceased production, Freeman published two lithographs through the company—*Deep in Hollywood* (or *Hollywood Harem*), 1936 and *Clown’s Story* (or *The Story Teller*), 1937.

\(^{170}\) Lewenthal is listed as one of Freeman’s early subscribers in “Bow to my Subscribers” *Newsstand* 06, (April 1938). He also received a special note of thanks in “Leaves of Gracias,” *Newsstand* 14 (October 1941) with the inscription, “To Reeves Lewenthal, who saw to it that this series came forth—with his unstinting interest.” Another member of the AAA staff, Estelle Mandell, also receives special mention on this page. This issue was the third of four published through the AAA. Based on Lewenthal’s shrewd assessment of popular appeal and profitable investments, the publication of *Newsstand* in 1941 can be seen as a significant gesture of support from a leading American art gallery. It also may be one of the only occasions that the AAA, or any private enterprise, was allowed to reproduce PWAP/FAP works for a commercial purpose. This same distinction applies to *Newsstand* 03 (March 1937) and *Newsstand* 06 (April 1938) both of which contained a print Freeman originally produced for a New Deal agency, see Seaton, *Art for Every Home*; Doss, *Looking at Life Magazine*; and Elizabeth Gaede Seaton, “Federal Prints and Democratic Culture: The Graphic Arts Division of the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project, 1935–1943” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2000).

\(^{171}\) The issue numbering used in this paper differs from the numbering systems applied by Freeman and is not reflected in the order the issues were microfilmed for the Archives of American Art. See Appendix C for a complete list of *Newsstand* issues. Freeman continued to release *Newsstand* during the war, though he abandoned the notion of assembling a set number of magazines per year and sought alternate publication methods during this period. According to Roy Freeman, his father published *Newsstand* as an occasional feature in *P.M.* between 1942 and 1945. (I was unable to identify every instance of *Newsstand* within *P.M.* but the feature appeared in at least three issues: June 6 and July 18, 1943 and June 4, 1944.) Freeman also released *Newsstand* 15 and 16 (Spring 1943 and September 1944). The latter issue (likely an extremely limited edition) was a collection of drawings from his time at Camp Gruber and the cover illustration reappears as the cover of Freeman’s book *It Shouldn’t Happen (to a Dog)* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1945).
residences across the country. A single issue cost fifty cents.\textsuperscript{172} The contents page of his premiere issue included small portraits of the first six subscribers; his teachers, Sloan and Harold Wickey, are among them.\textsuperscript{173} The next record of the recipients of Freeman’s lithographic series appears in \textit{Newsstand} 06 (April 1938). \textit{Bow to My Subscribers} (c. 1938; fig. 2.3) contains an impressive list of supporters and suggests that Freeman’s independent venture successfully extended his reputation beyond Manhattan.\textsuperscript{174}

The history of \textit{Newsstand} is irregular and difficult to pin down. Freeman did not keep detailed accounts of his magazine’s publication dates. \textit{Bow to My Subscribers} acts as the lone record of subscriptions. Freeman’s erratic numbering system complicated my effort to organize the issues chronologically. Most \textit{Newsstand} covers contain a volume and issue number; later editions are also grouped into series. Aside from \textit{Newsstands} 01–04, which included lists of illustrations, the contents of each copy of \textit{Newsstand} varied widely.\textsuperscript{175} The omission of an

\textsuperscript{172} The first two years he included subscription slips in the magazine that let people pay an annual fee of three dollars for six issues. The rate of publication never met this goal. Apart from the four issues published through the AAA in 1941, Freeman’s most productive year for \textit{Newsstand} was 1937 when he released three issues. As of 1940, the slips changed to offer the more feasible number of four issues for two dollars. The 1941 \textit{Newsstands} published by the AAA cost subscribers $2.75 for an annual subscription of four issues. The final issue of Freeman’s magazine shows the rate increased by April 1955 to five dollars per year and wisely omits the anticipated number of issues annually.

\textsuperscript{173} The other four subscribers are: Abe Levtiz, Cecil Bell, Pierre de Rohan (editor of the \textit{Federal Theater Magazine}), and Mr. Jaffe. (Mr. Jaffe appears in \textit{Newsstand} 11 (Winter 1941) with the description, “My laundryman and severest critic.” This suggests that the character of Mr. Lebrun in \textit{Come One, Come All} is based on Mr. Jaffe. See note 140 above.

\textsuperscript{174} A loose page of newspaper clippings in Freeman’s paper shows that reviews of \textit{Newsstand} appeared in the \textit{World Telegram} and regional papers from Buffalo (New York), Hollywood (California) and North Carolina. (The drawings and labels surrounding the clippings suggest the page once belonged to an issue of \textit{Newsstand}. The articles’ content narrows their likely date to 1937 or 1938.) These clippings also reveal that Freeman originally intended to organize collections of illustrations on certain themes (civic, theater), but this approach is only evident in \textit{Newsstand} 10 (January 1940) which he designated as a “Special Theater Issue,” DFP, Microfilm reel LA9.

\textsuperscript{175} This variation within issues does not apply to \textit{Newsstands} 11–14, when the AAA’s oversight and production assistance enabled (or more likely, required) all copies of a given issue to be identical. As explained by Roy Freeman, his father reused old stones, reprinted images, and alternated which images
informal table of contents in subsequent editions likely resulted from Freeman’s inability to predict which prints each recipient could expect. The pages bound by spiral wire or thread depended on the available impressions when Freeman and Cooley assembled the issue in their cramped Fourteenth Street apartment.

In December 1936, Freeman introduced several slogans for his new endeavor—“Signs of the times in lithographs,” “One man’s sketchbook,” or a personalized reworking of the New York Times’ motto, “All the news that fits to prints.”¹⁷⁶ As evidenced by the humorous mottos Freeman appropriated, he recognized his own participation in a competitive publishing field. Newsstand’s moniker and Freeman’s inclusion of tear-out subscription pages suggest he understood and embraced the journal’s ephemerality. The pages of “One Man’s Manhattan” could be dismantled, discarded, and take physical journeys beyond their initial delivery.

In Freeman’s urban views newsprint is acknowledged as ephemeral and disposable. Headlines appear as momentary distractions and eventual debris. Like Marsh’s inclusion of discarded newspapers along subway aisles, Freeman reinforced the short lifespan of news. The modern life-cycle of current events is summarized in Freeman’s depictions of flower vendors hawking their botanical wares encased in the previous day’s headlines. The glaring text intended to sell information one day became utilitarian wrapping paper the next.¹⁷⁷

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¹⁷⁶ This frontispiece of Newsstand 02 (December 1936) offered additional descriptive phrases for the uninitiated consumer, “Reports from a roving sketchpad all around the town. News not found on the ‘Front Page.’ New York’s own cast of characters in color and black and white from the original plates.”

¹⁷⁷ This character appears in the pages of Newsstand 04 (June 1937) with the floral wares wrapped with headlines including the words: “Bronx,” “Steel Strike,” “Bombs in Spain,” and “Duke weds.” Freeman recycled the vendor for the cover of Newsstand 12 (April 1941) and updated the headlines with current terms: “Raids,” “Sink,” “Bomb,” and “Port.”
Illustrations, as announced on the cover or frontispiece, were offset lithographs. Each *Newsstand* is approximately 12 x 9 inches. Occasionally, Freeman combined multiple vignettes on a same page, as in *That Fiorello Fellow* (1936), which showed nine scenes from an average day in the life of New York’s mayor. Predominantly, each page contained a single image (and the rare panoramic scenes appeared on extendable, tri-fold pages). Handwritten titles and narratives accompanied the images. In addition to specifying the date or location of a scene, Freeman authored mini-biographies of his subjects or transcribed a conversation. His literary and visual approaches emphasized humanitarian interests and fact-based presentation.

*Newsstand* 09 (August 1939) presented readers with a typescript essay, “To You,” in which Freeman described the ever-growing pile of sketchbooks—the result of his enthusiasm for New York and inability to resist sketching “even the most casual occurrence.” *Newsstand* was his method of sharing his observations; he concluded, “I saw—I want you to see.” Perhaps

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178 Issues of *Newsstand* vary in size; the images are approximately 10 x 8 inches. My estimate is based on private collection, museum, and gallery collection records.

179 *That Fiorello Fellow* (*Newsstand* 02, December 1936 and reprinted in *Newsstand* 05, November 1937) indicates the time of day for each scene. The mayor’s depicted activities include a conversation with a steelworker seated on a sky-high cross-beam (2 p.m.), a radio address (3 p.m.), wielding a pitch-axe over a street (5 p.m.), and attending an art show in formal attire (10 p.m.) The work likely resulted from Freeman’s day shadowing La Guardia, an invitation Freeman received after one of his drawings made its way to the mayor’s desk; Freeman, *Come One, Come All!,* 186.

180 Freeman, “To You,” final page of *Newsstand* 09 (August 1939). The conclusion of Freeman’s “To You” invites readers to accompany him as he explores Manhattan, “where you can witness with me actualities of the people living today’s today.” *Newsstand* is replete with first-person narratives and anecdotal images. When quoting a child’s enthusiasm at discovering a matching pair of discarded footwear amidst the debris lining railroad tracks, Freeman attempted to convey their accent or slang. Freeman followed this brief explanatory dialogue with a parenthetical note to readers, “actually overheard.” His addendum reiterates the image is factual, not imagined. (This contrasts with the subtitle of *Come One, Come All!,* where Freeman admits that the following tale was “drawn from memory.”) This passage also acts as an example of Freeman’s willingness to use dialects, slang, and phonetics when transcribing his sitter’s words. A lengthier example of this linguistic approach is the monologue paired with a portrait of Hobo Ike, *Newsstand* 13 (July 1941). The popularity of capturing the slang and dialect of particular neighborhoods, classes, or ethnicities is also apparent in “In a Manner of Speaking,” in *Almanac for New Yorkers,* Federal Writers’ Project (New York: Modern Age Books, 1938), 114–5.
unknowingly, Freeman’s impetus for *Newsstand* adhered to lessons espoused in Henri’s *The Art Spirit*. Henri used conversation as metaphor for an artist’s cultural role: “The American who is useful as an artist is one who studies his own life and records his experiences; in this way he gives evidence…The true artist regards his work as a means of talking with men, of saying his say to himself and to others.”¹⁸¹ From the debut of *Newsstand*, Freeman used the pages as vehicles for his subjective commentary, expressions of gratitude and admiration.

**VIEWS OF PASSENGERS AND PASSENGERS’ VIEWS**

Freeman once described himself as “backstagestruck,” a term he coined for his habit of verbally negotiating or physically maneuvering his way into theatres’ offstage spaces.¹⁸² He relayed the thrill of seeing the unscripted side of life to *Newsstand* subscribers. Unlike the multi-figure, tour-de-force of *Freedom of the Press*, many of Freeman’s depictions of passengers were understated images of unglamorous persons or activities. By presenting scenes that would usually go unnoticed or forgotten, Freeman drew attention to the unrehearsed dramas taking place in mobile environments.

A small line drawing of a man, *Pale Face* (c. 1939; fig. 2.4), demonstrates the sort of unrefined, behind-the-scenes subjects displayed through *Newsstand*.¹⁸³ Freeman captioned the

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¹⁸¹ Later in this *Art Spirit* essay, Henri expounds on the ameliorative effects of both visual art and music on social problems. Teenaged Freeman may have found this idea especially resonant, knowing that his musical talents would provide the income for him to pursue his passion for visual art. Henri, *The Art Spirit*, 116–7.


¹⁸³ *Newsstand* 09 (August 1939), also reproduced in Freeman, *Come One, Come All!,* 104–105. Freeman’s enthusiasm for sketching also followed Henri’s advice: “[The sketch hunter] moves through life as he finds it, not passing negligently the things he loves, but stopping to know them, and to note them down in the shorthand of his sketchbook. Like any hunter he hits or misses. He is looking for what he loves, he
simple portrait, “Has it ever smiled? All the way up to 185th Street his eyes stray and stick to Sunkist orange ads and how to reduce effectively.” The transcribed observations and rhetorical question illuminate why this person interested Freeman, and the ways *Newsstand* externalized the artist’s internal commentary.

In lieu of a transcribed narrative, other *Newsstand* transportation motifs contain embedded text. In addition to *Pale Face* and “To You,” *Newsstand* 09 presented *Crown Trouble* (c. 1939; fig. 2.5), another portrait of a solitary white man riding the subway. Here, Freeman wrote the title along the page’s bottom edge and paired it with an embedded headline and a sketch of a man to make a visual pun. The British royal couple toured Canada and the U.S. in May through June, 1939. Rather than present a traditional view of the King and Queen sightseeing or greeting state officials, Freeman referred to the international event through an unglamorous figure picking his teeth (dental crowns) and perusing an article about the monarchal voyage. The figure appears in profile with minimal shading in his hands and face. A second passenger is partially visible over his shoulder, and a circular hand strap is faintly delineated on the scene’s upper edge. In his careful selection of details surrounding the foreground figure, Freeman conveys the transit space without defining a specific route or time of day.

As seen in *Pale Face* and *Crown Trouble*, Freeman’s casual literary style paralleled his approach to draughtsmanship. He preserved the qualities of a sketch when he translated his drawings into lithographs. *Freedom of the Press* and his other PWAP/FAP prints received prolonged attention and thus show a higher level of completion. In contrast, the suggested rapidity of *Newsstand* images reinforced his written declarations that they were produced “on the

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tries to capture it. It’s found anywhere, everywhere. Those who are not hunters do not see these things. The hunter is learning to see and to understand—to enjoy,” Henri, *The Art Spirit*, 17.
Many of the illustrations are framed by irregular borders where gestural strokes do not extend to the page’s edge. These pictures’ centralized focus and dissolving perimeters are reminiscent of theatrical lighting. Attention is drawn to the activity on which Freeman shines a spotlight.

*The Letter Home* (c. 1937; fig. 2.6) displays a similar strategy. Two passengers appear at the end of a subway or elevated train. Their mobile conveyance is identifiable through the bench seat, barred window, and vertical partition adorned with an advertisement. *The Letter Home* is a somber view of a young Asian woman’s experience in an American city. Her elongated eyelids and dark hair contrast with Shirley Temple’s cherubic face on an advertisement in the upper portion of the scene. To the right edge, a man standing in the car’s doorway compartment holds a newspaper aloft. Its headline, “DRIVE ON SHANGHAI,” implies the woman may be connected to the latest battle in the Sino-Japanese War. *The Letter Home* acknowledges the challenges of immigrant populations when their native countries experienced hardships. Unlike the abundance of 1930s and 1940s art in which women’s reading material relayed national or cultural information, Freeman’s isolated passenger reads a private letter—a document intended to communicate across distances but not meaningful to the masses. Freeman strengthened our understanding of the woman’s pages as personal by shielding them from our view, whereas the newsprint and cereal advertisements face the viewer with legible phrases.

Freeman’s interests extended beyond passengers to include station and train attendants *Subway Guard* (1937; fig. 2.7) and *Easter* (c. 1938; fig. 2.8). Both feature a transit employee.

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184 Don Freeman, *Leaves from a Gotham Sketchpad* [“the following few pages are drawings done on the spot”], *Newsstand* 11 (Winter 1941).

185 The advertisement for puffed rice cereal may act as an additional reference to the woman’s implied ethnicity. Freeman probably recognized the ironic potential in Shirley Temple’s instructions to imbibe a modern, Americanized version of the grain that was central to many Asian diets.
confronting a passenger. In the 1937 print the guard is presented as a figure of sympathy as he watches a woman pry open the rear doors of a car even as she scowls in his direction. Easter uses a nearly identical setting and viewpoint, but the sympathetic character is now a petite, elderly woman cowering under the guard’s ire. His consternation at the slight, bespectacled passenger is unexplained. Perhaps she interrupted his routine instructions for passengers to alight and disembark in an orderly manner. Or perhaps she approached him in search of navigational assistance during rush hour. Regardless of the guard’s different responses to passengers, Freeman showed these men as individuals working amid travelers.

Freeman’s Newsstand illustrations represent a rare inclusion of guards, drivers, conductors, or attendants within the corpus of transit imagery from this period. The majority of representations of group travel during this period either renders transit workers invisible, or vilifies them as forceful machines acting against human cargo. Artists who adopted the latter approach focused on the most infamous subway employee, the masher or pusher-in. Starting in the 1870s, the New York Elevated Railway hired men to maximize train capacity during rush hours. These individuals evolved into the maligned pushers and mashers of the twentieth

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186 Subway Guard offers another example of the “spotlight” effect achieved through the picture’s amorphous edges. The cover illustration, Easter, more precisely locates the setting as a Forty-Second Street station according to the numerals on a platform pillar. As discussed earlier, Freeman’s proximity to the IRT Seventh Avenue Line and his affinity for Broadway, suggests this would be the Forty-Second Street station at Times Square.

187 Freeman’s other views of transit staff interacting with their customers include Spring Cleaning in the Subway (four-man subway cleaning crew with long mops pressed against the grimy walls of a subway station), 1941, offset lithograph, Museum of the City of New York, 2013.13.42.4; and The Man Who Left the Farm Because He Hated Milking Cows - Comes to New York and Becomes a Coin Collector in the Turnstile (a uniformed man kneeling by a subway turnstile to retrieve the coins), c. 1930–45, charcoal and ink on board, 11 x 15 inches, Museum of the City of New York, 2013.13.31.
A masher’s compression skills benefited mass transit companies to the detriment of travelers.

Ida Abelman, a printmaker who created several abstracted views of New York City, depicted a masher in action in *Wonders of Our Time* (1937; fig. 2.9). Abelman gave the picture an asymmetrical border. The arched tunnel and track act as the picture’s right edge; the left side terminates at a support pillar and the upper left quadrant dissolves amid the ceiling cross-beams. Within this geometric space, a platform agent is the dominant visual element and the only figure shown in full. He wears gray trousers, coat, and matching hat, and leans into the crowd of faces shown through the train’s open doors. The pusher faces downward, using his shoulder and over-sized hand to cram the passengers in the vehicle before the doors close. *The Wonders of Our Time* identifies this activity, the herding of travelers onto congested vehicles, as a hallmark of modern life. Abelman’s sarcastic title highlights the uncomfortable environment of daily commutes.

Al Hirschfeld (1903–2003), a friend of Freeman, illustrated a 1940 *New York Times Magazine* article profiling the infamous subway masher. His images accompanied Lewis Bergman’s “Sardine Chauffeurs and Pushers-in,” and presented a more typical view of a Times Square platform at rush hour (fig. 2.10). Bergman (1918–1988) reported on the state of the

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188 As a solution for increasing train delays, this position was reinstated along New York’s busiest platforms in 2015, though with less physical contact between commuters and transit employees. Metropolitan Transportation Authority, “Platform Controller Program,” *MTAinfo*, November 16, 2015, https://youtu.be/Tlc9Q5MVZXw.

189 Abelman also depicted transit motifs in two color lithographs for the FAP, *Greetings from Manhattan* (1939) and *Machine and El Patterns* (1935–9).

recently unified New York City railways and the condition of transit employees charged with the
maintenance and operation of the expanded system. Subway careers included station agents,
platform guards, conductors, and motormen. Only the motormen (“full-fledged sardine
chauffeurs”) were safely distanced from the litany of public nuisances Bergman described: the
amateur doormen who held the doors open when the train is ready to depart, the people who
claimed a spot just inside the doors and refused to move further into the cars, the spitters,
smokers, and people with oversized parcels. Station “pests” ranged from shoe-shine boys who
blocked thoroughfares to drunks who harassed passers-by. Bergman’s list of transit facilities’
problematic patrons was a tacit call for improved behavior and cooperation. Like Freeman’s
Subway Guard, Bergman offered a sympathetic view of the men responsible for directing the
flow of passengers.

Hirschfeld’s largest illustration, reproduced above the article’s title, shows passengers
loading (and being loaded) onto a train at the Times Square station. The article defends pushers-
in and sardine-packers and explains that their main task is answering questions and politely
encouraging passengers to keep moving. In the accompanying image, three guards compress the
hordes through their respective portals. Apart from a stray figure in the left foreground, the
guards’ persuasive efforts have successfully cleared the platform. Hirschfeld did not absolve the
sardine-packers of their notoriety, but he illustrated their plight and purpose. When viewed in the

with the following caption: “Al Hirschfeld—caricaturist, traveler, collector of masks and sculpture, hot
record connoisseur, intense enjoyer of life, humorist, keeper of open house to multifarious friends,
lithographer, and drum beater. At work in his barber chair making a drawing for the Sunday drama
section.” Hirschfeld contributed the introductory essay on Newsstand to McCulloch’s catalogue

191 Bergman, “Sardine Chauffeurs,” 10. Bergman summarizes the relevant numbers for the city’s public
rail lines; 27,000 employees help transport 1.8 billion passengers along 781 miles of track.

context of Bergman’s account, these transit employees tolerated public vitriol and provided an integral service.

Hirschfeld’s illustrations for *New York Times Magazine* appeared during the same year as Bernard Brussel-Smith’s *Subway Crush* (1940; fig. 2.11). Both represent transit employees and subway crowds prior to President Roosevelt’s declaration of war, but *Subway Crush* alludes to the European crisis. Like Abelman and Hirschfeld, Brussel-Smith used the figure of a subway guard as the primary focus of his picture. His dark, uniformed figure creates a silhouette against the subway car’s interior lighting and acts as a temporary door while his arms reach to pull the portal closed. The anonymous subway employee becomes a human extension of the machine.\(^{193}\) The overlapping bodies and detached appendages starkly contrast to the angle and solidity of the doorman. Seen laterally, the guard’s pose does not imply he is directly responsible for the crushed interior. Instead, the man’s extended arms and leftward angle emphasize the exertion needed to pull the door closed.

In line with the downturned head of the guard, *Subway Crush* contains two elements that intensify the scene’s sense of pressure. The passenger immediately inside the doorway is a black man who reaches toward a woman, who in turn extends her hand to retrieve her hat from the impending *crush* of the doors. The black man’s leftward angle balances the contour of the guard’s torso. Together their bodies form an inverted triangle at the center of the picture.

Although the man’s activity does not impede the guard’s task, their position and placement are opposite. Brussel-Smith places the African-American figure in a position of central importance and inserts subtle cues to the historical context within the throng of passengers. The words “Daily” and “Nazi” are visible on a newspaper between the compressed bodies and limbs. Even

\(^{193}\) *Machines’ control over human life is memorably performed in Fritz Lang’s* *Metropolis* *(1927).*
if we consider that the text is minor in comparison to the surrounding composition, it nevertheless holds a prominent location at the upper left of the central pairing. *Subway Crush* depicts both the physical pressure of rush hour mobility and the external pressure of an international war.

**NEWSSTAND IN NEW CONTEXTS**

The four *Newsstands* produced in 1941 differ from Freeman’s “in-house” versions in several ways. The AAA issues are generally longer—they averaged thirty-five pages and included essays and illustrations created by Freeman’s friends and AAA colleagues. The format was slightly larger and spiral wire replaced the knotted string or brass tacks that bound earlier installments.

Before examining the visual transformations to New York City and its inhabitants leading up to the war, it is important to survey the types and tones of the written passages in the AAA Newsstands. *Newsstand 12* (April 1941) contained two contributions that express the growing sense of angst and patriotic fervor as America learned about the events in Europe. British actor Boris Karloff’s “A Few Words About Our City,” reminded readers that the Big Apple was the largest city unaffected by the global conflict. New Yorkers were fortunate to live in a place that did not experience the blackouts and bombings suffered by European residents. Norman Corwin (1910–2011), an author and radio producer, provided “An Unfinished Verse,” which outlined his hatred of the Nazi party and others who met his description of, “the trickers of The People: The quill-scratch killers squiggling terms on parchment; the blasé bishops…the Cesar-breed…The Jew-blamers, the bully-boys; the burners of the book and the keepers of the books; the baiters
and the bodyguards, the busters and the bums.” Following Corwin’s strongly worded condemnation, Freeman placed a view of the Statue of Liberty illuminated—an unusually unpopulated image in his oeuvre. The July 1941 issue contained another declaration against fascist ideals, poet e.e. cummings’s “Alphabetical Portrait of An ‘American’ ‘Intellectual.’” The poem lists a series of equivalencies which aligned with Freeman’s egalitarian approach to his subjects. “Woman = Man,” “private = public,” “Jew = gentile,” “democratic = classes,” appear intermingled with other observations.195

Freeman’s art from 1940 to 1943 offers valuable information on the ways World War II altered the visual landscape of the U.S. As the war escalated, Newsstand illustrations included succinct summaries of the anxious environment. Adapting strategies apparent in Daumier’s lithographs and Sloan’s etchings, Speed Up America! (c. 1941; fig. 2.12) demonstrates Freeman’s typically light-hearted perspective on the impact of war on American daily life.196

In the foreground, a man lounges on a bench. He leans against the armrest with his right leg stretched onto the adjoining seat and right arm propped over the back of the bench. A coat drapes over his left arm and pins a folded newspaper against his chest. His left hand limply holds a smoldering cigarette implying his consciousness has just momentarily lapsed. His downturned face is fully visible, eyes shut, lips parted, jawline slackened. Wrinkled trousers, loosened tie, and tipped hat all imply the subject endured a long day at “the office.”

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194 Newsstand 12 (April 1941).
196 No title appeared with Speed Up America! when it was included in Newsstand 13 (July 1941). I assigned this title based on the central embedded text. The scene is not unlike Marsh’s Why Not use the ‘L’? in its subject and use of ironic written phrases. The setting of Speed Up America! is debatable because benches and posters were common in public spaces. However, this arrangement of these elements (large-format advertisements along a wall fronted by seats) supports my interpretation of the setting as a transit hub.
The capitalized, block lettering in the upper right quadrant of the picture appears as an exclamatory command from a bearded variation of Uncle Sam on a large placard. His patriotic instruction falls upon the figure seated below, who has nodded into a nap while a cigarette still burns between the fingers of his left hand. Uncle Sam gazes downward off the wall and points toward a flaming swastika in the center of the picture. Sam’s eyes are directed at the slumberous traveler whose face is nearly in line with the burning symbol. These two men, one a two-dimensional image and the other a living, breathing person resting on a public bench, establish the immediate contrast between patriotic action and home front exhaustion.

Freeman reiterated the opposing forces at play in this urban transit scene by pairing the bombastic poster with a like-sized advertisement for Swallo. The beverage company also makes exclamatory pleas, “Don’t Worry, Take it Easy and Cool Off! Drink Swallo.” The weary, disheveled traveler sits directly beneath the authoritative Uncle Sam but he enacts the beverage ad’s directive. As discussed in Brussel-Smith’s Subway Crush, Freeman used a truncated headline, “Nazis Captu,” to signal the wartime context. In this lone figure, Freeman summarized conflicting messages directed at the American public in 1940 and 1941. As the country attempted to balance between assisting its allies and resolving domestic political conflicts, the violence abroad gradually invaded public spaces.

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197 Another of Freeman’s witty adaptations of Uncle Sam appears on the cover of Newsstand 17 (Summer 1948) where the patriotic patriarch reclines on a chaise, nervously grips the edge of the seat with one hand and clenches his jacket in the other. His striped pants are rumpled due to his feet rubbing together. His eyebrows rise and his mouth arches downward. This is Uncle Sam, riddled with anxiety as he receives a diagnosis from the psychiatrist shown behind his reclined patient and writing “fear” at the top of his notepad.

198 Similar mock-advertisements harass Freeman’s central character in This Shouldn’t Happen (1945). The hungry canine encounters a row of posters marketing food while he waits on a subway platform.

199 The exact date of production for this issue is unknown, but if Freeman assembled the illustrations in late June it is possible the headline appeared with reports about Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union. Alternatively, the text may not replicate a specific headline, but depict rather the underlying presence of war-related news.
The visual landscape of New York City’s transportation spaces offered prime real estate for the increasing number of government and corporate communications during the 1940s. While the broadside from *Speed Up America!* may be fictional, its iconography and message were familiar to 1941 audiences. A poster that bears a close resemblance to Freeman’s irate Uncle Sam used excerpts from President Roosevelt’s Annual Congressional Address in 1943 (1943; fig. 2.13). Rather than Uncle Sam giving orders, three quotes pulled from the president’s speech declare, “Speed! Will save lives! Speed! Will save this nation! Speed! Will save our freedom!” Posters like this were introduced before the country entered the war and became commonplace by early 1942. *Fortune* magazine dedicated a lengthy spread to the benefits of well-planned posters: “What labor must realize is that in total war every citizen, whether in or out of uniform, is a combatant; that in the kind of total war the United States is fighting—a war of production—labor’s role is even more crucial than that of the armed forces.” The *Fortune* staff commended the design experience of WPA artists and promoted them as a valuable resource for the war effort.

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201 “A Portfolio of Posters,” 82.
Figure 2.1
Don Freeman
*Freedom of the Press*, 1936
Lithograph
10 x 13 1/4 inches
Edition of 25
Reproduced in *Newsstand* 03, March 1937
Figure 2.2
James Penney
*Subway—Interior*, 1933
Gouache and watercolor with newspaper collage
17 3/4 x 21 7/8 inches
Sale 2354, Lot 105 at Swann Galleries, American Art, June 12, 2014
Figure 2.3
Don Freeman
*Bow to My Subscribers*, c. 1938
Offset lithograph
Reproduced in *Newsstand* 06, April 1938
All *Newsstand* images are approximately 10 x 8 inches and were released in editions of 200 or more.
Figure 2.4
Don Freeman
*Pale Face*, c. 1939
Offset lithograph
Reproduced in *Newsstand 09*, August 1939
All *Newsstand* images are approximately 10 x 8 inches and were released in editions of 200 or more.
Figure 2.5
Don Freeman
*Crown Trouble*, c. 1939
Offset lithograph
Reproduced in *Newsstand* 09, August 1939
All *Newsstand* images are approximately 10 x 8 inches and were released in editions of 200 or more.
Figure 2.6
Don Freeman
*The Letter Home*, c. 1937
Offset lithograph
Reproduced in *Newsstand* 05, November 1937
All *Newsstand* images are approximately 10 x 8 inches and were released in editions of 200 or more.
Figure 2.7
Don Freeman
*Subway Guard*, 1937
Offset lithograph
Reproduced in *Newsstand* 03, March 1937, and *Newsstand* 11, Winter 1941
All *Newsstand* images are approximately 10 x 8 inches and were released in editions of 200 or more.
Figure 2.8
Don Freeman
Easter, c. 1938
Offset lithograph
Reproduced in Newsstand 06, April 1938
All Newsstand images are approximately 10 x 8 inches and were released in editions of 200 or more.
Figure 2.9
Ida Abelman
*Wonders of Our Time, 1937*
Lithograph
15 1/2 x 11 1/8 inches
Edition of 50
Whitney Museum of American Art, Purchase, with funds from the Print Committee, 93.80
"The platform men do their job of getting riders in and out of trains with remarkable restraint and politeness, considering."

Figure 2.10
Al Hirschfeld
Illustration for "Sardine Chauffeurs and Pushers-in"
New York Times Magazine, June 30, 1940, 10
Figure 2.11
Bernard Brussel-Smith
*Subway Crush*, 1940
Lithograph
10 7/8 x 14 3/4 inches
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Reba and Dave Williams Collection, Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 2008.115.1083
Figure 2.12
Don Freeman
*Speed Up America!*, c. 1941
Offset lithograph
Reproduced in *Newsstand* 13, July 1941
All *Newsstand* images are approximately 10 x 8 inches and were released in editions of 200 or more.
Figure 2.13
General Motors Corporation, Oldsmobile Division
*Speed! Will save lives! Speed! Will save this nation! Speed! Will save our freedom!*, 1942
Color lithograph
40 1/8 x 29 7/8 inches
University of Minnesota Libraries, MSP04278
Chapter Three

WALKER EVANS

I am excused for serving up the compound unposed portrait of a milieu, a locale, and a delineated world of citizenry. Citizenry—as always—partly bemused, totally trapped, and always persevering.

—Walker Evans, 1966

Walker Evans (1903–1975) took more than six hundred photos aboard the New York City subway between January 1938 and January 1941. The pictures were not presented to the public for fifteen years, and even then they remained largely unseen until the publication of Many Are Called in 1966.\footnote{Many Are Called (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), reprinted with foreword by Luc Sante and afterword by Jeff L. Rosenheim, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004). Citations are to the 2004 edition, which is available for partial viewing through Google Books, \url{https://books.google.com/books?id=94x5gNZha3sC&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false}.} (For the chronology of these photographs’ creation and publication, see Appendix D.) The length of time between the series’ origin and distribution sets Evans’s transit imagery apart from other works examined in this dissertation. His desire to make unposed portraits and present them in an unbiased, neutral manner ultimately led him to put the project on hold for two decades. Like the “trapped citizenry” shown in the photographs, the images themselves were stuck between their creation and publication.\footnote{Walker Evans, “Twenty Thousand Moments under Lexington Avenue: A Superfluous Word,” (Draft text for a maquette of \textit{Lexington Avenue Local}), 1966; reprinted in Sarah Greenough, \textit{Walker Evans: Subways and Streets} (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 127.}

A critical feature of Evans’s subway series is that its production rejected hidden motives (which he associated with traditional studio portraiture) but embraced secretive methods (concealed equipment). His decision to take pictures aboard public vehicles was part of a broader search for settings and techniques that bypassed subjects’ discomfort, insecurities, or objections.
In January 1938, eight months before *American Photographs* opened at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and secured his position in the canon of U.S. photographers, Evans ventured beneath the streets of Manhattan in search of unknown and unknowing sitters.

This chapter considers the influence of *American Photographs* on his contemporaneous subway project, the texts he paired with the series, as well as the broader contexts of photography and New York City. A close reading of the written and visual accounts from Evans’s subway excursions informs my supposition that his goals of objectivity and detachment were complicated by his candid approach and the social significance of New York’s transit system. After outlining some of the major concerns of the artist during the late thirties and early forties, I offer historical readings of several images from *Many Are Called* as examples of the contextual associations Evans sought to avoid by withholding the series from public view until 1956.

**EVANS’S EARLY CAREER**

A one-time aspiring author, Evans abandoned his literary hopes in 1927, when he returned to New York from Paris and began making photographs. Evans moved frequently during his first five years in New York. Initially he found apartments and darkrooms in the

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205 In his interview for the Archives of American Art, Evans did not offer specific addresses but recalled living in both Greenwich Village and Brooklyn Heights, see *Oral history interview with Walker Evans*, October 13–December 23, 1971, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.;
vicinity of Greenwich Village and Union Square—the same territory as Reginald Marsh, Don Freeman, and their peers. When Evans took the subway photographs, his apartment and darkroom were located in Yorkville, an Upper East Side neighborhood; the closest subway station (at Ninety-Sixth Street) was serviced by the Interborough Rapid Transit’s (IRT) Lexington Avenue Line.²⁰⁶ Like the IRT’s other Manhattan artery, the Seventh Avenue Line, the tracks beneath Lexington Avenue carried a broad spectrum of New York residents.

Before he became the first Information Specialist hired by the Farm Security Administration (FSA), Evans published his camerawork in both books and magazines.²⁰⁷ These early commercial efforts and gallery shows caught the attention of a Columbia-trained economist named Roy Stryker (1893–1975), who needed photographers to create visual records for the Resettlement Administration (later the FSA). Stryker appreciated Evans’s straight photographic

²⁰⁶ http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-walker-evans-11721. Addresses culled from his interviews and photographs include: an apartment shared with his friend Hans Skolle near Union Square, 13 East Fourteenth Street (1928 and 1931), an apartment near the Brooklyn end of Brooklyn Bridge, 48 Brooklyn Heights (also 1928–31). During his early career, Evans had a darkroom on Union Square at 92 Fifth Avenue. This location was a short walk away from Skolle’s apartment and a short train ride from Brooklyn via the Brooklyn-Manhattan Transportation’s (BMT) Third Avenue Elevated. During his Farm Security Administration career, Evans lived with his friend Ben Shahn and Shahn’s family in their Greenwich Village apartment, 23 Bethune Street (later 20 Bethune Street). This residence appears in photographs by Evans and Shahn, as well as correspondence between Evans and Roy Stryker.

approach and initiated their occasionally contentious work relationship in June 1935. Despite the brevity of Evans’s FSA career (he resigned in the summer 1938), his time with the agency resulted in hundreds of prints and contributed to the evolving conception of documentary photography as practiced in the United States.²⁰⁸

The illustrations for Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (1941), some of Evans’s most famous photographs of the Great Depression, however, were not produced for Stryker and the FSA. In the summer of 1936, he took a leave of absence from the group and, along with author James Agee (1909–1955), lived with three sharecropper families in Hale County, Alabama. Agee and Evans embarked on their Alabama sojourn at the behest of Fortune, but the magazine declined to publish the resulting illustrations or text.²⁰⁹ Five years later, the pair found a willing publisher (Houghton Mifflin), but their social documentation initially met with lackluster reviews.²¹⁰ Although there would be difficulties associated with the pair’s examination of southern agricultural laborers, Agee would remain an important figure in Evans’s life and his influence shaped the creation and eventual release of Many Are Called.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ A list of suggestions for possible photography subjects (including subways) made during his government employment shows Evans’s interest in transportation spaces came several years before he began work on Many Are Called, see Walker Evans, Walker Evans At Work, 107.


For Evans, photography was a mechanical and chemical process; a successful photographer mastered camera operation, print development, and editing skills. Evans did not like to define his work as documentary, though this classification became entwined with his career by the end of his stint at the FSA. Beaumont Newhall (1908–1993), who published the first comprehensive history of American photography in 1937 and became MoMA’s first curator of photography in 1940, examined the origins and impact of the “documentary method” as exemplified by Evans and his FSA colleagues. Newhall’s 1938 article, “Documentary Approach to Photography,” argued that for a photograph to qualify as documentary it must be the result of careful study and mental preparation on the part of the camera holder. He recommended photos be displayed or published in series, accompanied by explanatory texts. Evans’s description of his work as “documentary style” differed from Newhall’s explanation of images as communicating a predetermined message. For Evans, “documentary style” referred to a photographic approach with no ulterior purpose or function, and he considered captions a journalistic tool.

Evans’s deceased friend. As noted by Mia Fineman, Agee’s 1937 poem, “Rapid Transit,” may have been the source for Evans’s title of the 1956 selection of photos; see Mia Fineman, “Notes from the Underground: The Subway Portraits,” in Walker Evans, ed. Maria Morris Hambourg (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 115; James Agee, “Rapid Transit,” Forum and Century 97, no. 2 (February 1937): 115. Agee dedicated Let Us Now Praise Famous Men to his collaborator, and Evans reciprocated the gesture in his dedication of Many Are Called to Agee.


213 Evans explained documentary style as a style based on detachment and an interest in recording what is visible. He defined the phrase in a lecture delivered at Yale in 1964: “My thought is that the term ‘documentary’ is inexact, vague, and even grammatically weak, as used to describe a style in photography which happens to be my style... The real thing that I’m talking about has a purity and a certain severity, rigor, simplicity, directness, clarity, and it is without artistic pretension in a self-conscious sense of the word,” Walker Evans, “Lyric Documentary” lecture at Yale University, 11 March 1964, reprinted in Evans, Walker Evans at Work, 238. Technically this entailed the use of existing light and straightforward views. Evans noted his recognition as the originator of the documentary style was
Newhall and Evans shared an emphasis on development and printing techniques as central elements of documentary images. When questioned about his darkroom processes and alterations, Evans explained that cropping and dodging (changing the depth of tone in certain areas of a print) were the extent of his technical interventions. Even with these adjustments, he argued that in order for a photograph to be high quality, the printing methods needed to be invisible to the viewer.\footnote{214}

As implied by Newhall’s 1938 article, the New Deal notion of photography as frank and unambiguous relied on visual information defined and enhanced by written details (whether biographical or statistical). This emphasis on realism and veracity applied equally across various New Deal endeavors in literature, theater productions, films, and visual art.\footnote{215} In his use of


\footnote{215} Lauren Arnold, The Federal Art Project: American Prints from the 1930s in the Collection of the University of Michigan Museum of Art (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 12. The narrative explanation of a FSA photograph did not necessarily include the individual’s identity, thus a certain amount of anonymity is present in many FSA portraits. William Stott’s Documentary Expression and Thirties America cogently summarizes the cultural desire for first-hand knowledge and financial transparency following the Stock Market Crash in 1929. He provided overviews of the varied ways Works Project Administration art programs pursued documentary ideals, see William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). Alan Trachtenberg also examined this subject in “Signifying the Real: Documentary Photography in the 1930s,” in The Social and the Real: Political Art of the 1930s in the Western Hemisphere, ed. Alejandro Anreus, Diana L. Linden, and Jonathan Weinberg (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2006), 3–19. The importance of FSA photographer’s preparatory research and regional familiarity is described in Forrest Jack Hurley, Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972). Stryker and his boss, Rexford Tugwell, were tireless advocates of cameras as tools for sociological data-gathering. Cara A. Finnegan’s Picturing Poverty outlines the creation of an “information group” within the Department of Agriculture, its evolution into Stryker’s team of photographers, and the classification and distribution
“documentary style,” Evans created a distinctive body of work and set his work apart from the corpus of documentary photographs that he considered commonplace and not artistic.\(^{216}\)

Between Evans’s departure from the government payroll and the publication of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, he experienced major success with the exhibition *American Photographs* (MoMA, September 28–November 18, 1938).\(^{217}\) The show’s catalogue featured a statement by Lincoln Kirstein (1907–1996) on its cover and a longer essay following the photographs—eighty-seven images divided into two sections. In its design and scale, *Many Are Called* retained much of the appearance of its 1938 antecedent. Each image in *American Photographs* appears alone on the right-hand page. The left page is blank apart from numbers in the lower left corner that correspond to a list at the end of each section where Evans provided each photograph’s location and date. In both *American Photographs* and *Many Are Called*, unprinted paper creates thick white frames around each work. Both prevent the reader from examining images alongside each other, although Kirstein instructed audiences to view the contents of *American Photographs* in sequence.

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system used to ensure the social and legislative acceptance of documentary photos as factual; Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003).

\(^{216}\) FSA photographs were displayed across the country to serve multivalent purposes (educational, political, journalistic, etc.). In his interview for the Archives of American Art, Evans described the subway pictures as an entirely self-motivated enterprise: “It was a project of love. Its value to me— Nobody asked me to do that. Nobody paid me to do that,” *Oral history interview with Walker Evans* (1971).

\(^{217}\) 1938 was two years before Newhall became the Museum’s first curator of photography. The exhibition included one hundred photographs. Of these, seventy were made for the FSA and some were close variants of the Victorian architecture series exhibited at MoMA in 1933. The ratio of photographs in *American Photographs* to the number included in the book (one hundred to eighty-seven) contrasts with the forty-one to eighty-nine ratio of photos displayed and published for *Many Are Called*. On the catalogue’s publication history and differences between various editions, see Sarah Hermanson Meister, “A Note on the Seventy-Fifth-Anniversary Edition,” in *American Photographs*, Walker Evans (1938; New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 201–4.
Kirstein’s essay placed Evans alongside Henri Cartier-Bresson and describes the catalogue as a socio-historical record akin to Eugene Atget’s views of Paris and Matthew Brady’s scenes from the Civil War. In advocating that American Photographs represented the evolution of art photography, Kirstein set his friend apart from contemporary amateurs. He was especially derisive about the growing number of candid photographers and their “great pretensions to accuracy.” Although Kirstein did not identify the perpetrators by name, his description fits the camerawork predominantly displayed in tabloids or entertainment stories. He explained, “The candid-technique has little candour. It sensationalizes movement, distorts gesture, and caricatures emotion. Its only inherent characteristic is the accidental shock that obliterates the essential nature of the event it pretends to discover. It is anarchic, naïve and superficial.”

Kirstein’s condemnation of this contemporary trend suggests its relevance to Evans’s subway project, which began in the winter before the exhibition opened. The following discussion reveals the ways the development and perception of candid photography influenced the photographer’s underground series and factored into his decision to preserve the resulting images until a time when candid techniques no longer irked art critics.

CANDID CAMERAS AND UNPOSED PORTRAITS

In her landmark book, On Photography, Susan Sontag (1933–2004) espoused a similar argument to Kirstein’s 1938 comments when she remarked, “That photographs are often praised for their candor, their honesty, indicates that most photographs, of course, are not candid.”

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219 Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1977; New York: Picador, 2001), 86. Citations are to the Picador edition. Evans’s skepticism over the ability of a photograph to be truthful is aptly demonstrated in a frequently quoted exchange from 1974: “[Interviewer]: Do you think it’s
Evans considered candor a rare quality in photography. During the same period when the American public became increasingly familiar with documentary photography, consumers also learned about candid procedures and technology. Starting in the 1880s manufacturers and entrepreneurs designed cameras of decreasing size. By the 1930s, hand-held, portable “candid” cameras became commonplace; their ease of use and affordable prices led to a new wave of amateur enthusiasts. More people had access not only to snapping photographs, but also to taking them surreptitiously.

Americans’ introduction to this genre of camerawork came from seeing Erich Salomon’s photographs of The Hague published in *Fortune*, November 1931. The German photographer was the first to be described as using “candid photography,” and his approach became widely known through features in American picture magazines. These publications proliferated on newsstand shelves starting in 1937. The trail blazed by the immense popularity of *Life* (first issue possible for the camera to lie? [Evans]: It certainly is. It almost always does,” Evans, “The Things Itself,” 15.


221 Salomon’s photos of The Hague appeared in *Fortune* 4, November 1931. Newhall summarized the candid approach and noted that like documentary photographs, the designation is mistakenly applied to weak imitations. In his words, “The ‘candid’ school from the truly amazing unposed portraits of Dr. Erich Salomon (1886–1944) in the late twenties to the most casual snapshot by anyone whose pocketbook can afford a miniature camera with an f/2 lens. Dr. Salomon’s pictures were correctly described by the editor of a London illustrated paper as ‘candid,’ but the majority of similar photographs deserve no such adjective. And so it is with ‘documentary’” Newhall (1938), 5. Evans described Salomon as “a camera-carrying Peeping Tom,” who practiced “a kind of photographic spy work,” phrases he intended as compliments and evidence that his predecessor was underappreciated during his lifetime. Evans, “Photography,” in *Quality: Its Image in the Arts*, ed. Louis Kronenberger (New York: Athenaeum, 1969), 176. Salomon’s ability to covertly record national leaders is exemplified by his photograph of the U.S. Supreme Court, one of only two photos showing the judges in session, Sonja West, “Smile for the Camera,” *Slate*, October 2012, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2012/10/the_supreme_court_forbids_cameras_in_the_courtroom_but_twice_rogue_photographers_have_snapped_a_picture_of_the_justices_at_work_.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2012/10/the_supreme_court_forbids_cameras_in_the_courtroom_but_twice_rogue_photographers_have_snapped_a_picture_of_the_justices_at_work_.html)
dated November 1936) was quickly followed by media companies and publishing houses. Candid photography was standard fare in such magazines as: *Look* (January 1937), *Photo History* (January 1937), *Pic* (April 1937), *Foto* (May 1937), *Now & Then* (July 1937), *See* (October 1937), and *Picture* (December 1937). By the end of 1938, an editorial in *American Mercury* warned readers that the camera, a seemingly innocuous product, “threatens to transform man into a species of goldfish, by exposing his private life, loves, and scandals to public view, and render him brainless by removing the necessity for thought.” The dire argument against public paparazzi concluded with a reminder that as legislation moved more slowly than technology, “the so-called right of privacy has become a privilege enjoyed by Homo sapiens at mere sufferance.” Another disparaging assessment of the popular photographic strategy appeared in Alexander H. Buchman’s “The ‘Minicam’ Comes of Age,” where he opined,

> The novelty of candid pictures is rapidly dying out; it has been greatly overdone. People are, with justification, tired of seeing Aunt Sally adjusting her corset, of seeing Senator X picking his nose, of dancers adjusting their tights, of President Y sneezing, of little Johnny brushing his teeth, of Ambassador Z eating macaroni.

Evans’s interest in the aesthetic potential of hand-held cameras was tempered by their association with popular entertainment or worse, with the degradation of America’s moral fiber.

Jacob Deschin (1900–1983) covered photography for *Scientific American* and reported on the techniques and capabilities of miniature cameras. His 1935 article, “Candid Photography,” promotes side-angle viewers for their ability, “to give the impression of aiming at something

222 The debut of *Picture* predicated an article in *Business Week* that reported on the astonishing proliferation of these photographically centered magazines. (*Picture* was sold starting December 28, 1937 but the first issue is dated February 1938.) “More Picture Magazines,” *Business Week*, December 4, 1937, 28–9.


down the street while actually taking the picture of a subject standing at right angles to the photographer’s apparent vision.” Deschin explained that those interested in making candid photographs must train themselves to choose optimal moments. In his estimation, the decision on when to release the shutter “makes all the difference in the world between a prosaic portrait and the lively unposed snapshot that has all the poetry of life.” The article cautioned aspiring amateurs on the difficulties of catching elderly citizens off guard and suggests placing a camera beneath one’s arm and facing away from the intended target. Other techniques mentioned in the article include taking pictures at night or inside theaters.

The contrast between the amateur candid approach described by Deschin and the objective ideas pursued by Evans is highlighted by the differences between their photographs. Images printed alongside Deschin’s commentary show nighttime diners at a free “lunch” counter and a stage performance captured from a balcony seat. The illustration, In the Subway (fig. 3.1), accompanies the caption, “An interesting character study taken underground.” Deschin’s example of a camera’s ability to capture mobile scenes differs significantly from the photos taken by Evans less than three years later. In the Subway contains four passengers seated along a bench, shown from an oblique viewpoint. A woman in dark attire sits on the left edge, her figure


226 Ibid. An example of his concept of poetic portraiture is not reproduced with the article, but the accompanying illustrations demonstrated the variety of darkened spaces now open to cameramen. Jacob Deschin published New Ways in Photography: Ideas for the Amateur (New York: Wittlesey House, 1936; available digitally through HathiTrust) and went on to become an art critic for the New York Times.

227 Deschin’s advice for night shots is to use a wide-open lens and shallow depth of focus. Camera operators must select subjects in slow motion or at rest. Photographs of stage performances were commonly seen in advertisements, theater posters, and newspaper reviews.

228 Deschin, “Candid Photography,” 250. The caption also offered technical advice for those interested in mass transit snapshots, “Exposure made at 1/20 of a second with a diaphragm opening of f/2.” No credit lines accompany with the illustrations in this article, but Deschin’s writing (here and in his books) uses personal anecdotes and narratives. It is reasonable to conclude that he was both the author and cameraman for his publications on photography.
divided by the white, vertical pole in the foreground. The blurred pages of her book are the only
evidence of the camera’s slowed shutter. Three men sit to her left; two hold reading material and
the third is barely shown on the picture’s right edge. Despite its small size, In the Subway
showed Scientific American readers the amount of detail and specificity capable of being
photographed in previously impossible conditions.  

For professional and amateurs alike, candid techniques challenged the artifice of studio
portraiture and offered the possibility of innovative, unexpected results. Traditional portrait
photographs relied on props, lighting, and changeable sets to create the desired effect. This was
anathema to Evans’s pursuit of “detachment, lack of sentimentality, originality.”  

It is reasonable to conclude that the media flurry for hidden camerawork influenced Evans’s strategic
decision to postpone the display of his candid experiments. Not unlike the recent surge in
camera-phones, the boom in photographers equipped with “mini-cams” heightened the need to

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229 Deschin’s In the Subway shows that Evans was not the first to venture beneath New York’s streets in
search of camera subjects. 1938, the year Evans began his series, is also the year that Marsh purchased
his first high-quality camera, a Leica 35mm, and proceeded to take photographs to use as preparatory
materials for paintings. His subjects overlapped with those of other artists in New York City, including
subway passengers. Marsh did not consider his photographs part of his artistic oeuvre, but scholars have
included them in subsequent examinations of his style and process. See Sasha Nicholas, “Camera-
evidence of his subway excursions, the public saw examples by his contemporaries. By 1940, Lou
Stoumen (1917–1991) and Lee Sievan (1907–1990) also took photographs of New York City’s
commuters. David Robbins, a New York City photographer active with the Photo League and previously
employed by the Federal Arts Project, took pictures aboard the subway in 1943. Eighteen-year-old
Stanley Kubrick (b.1928), the youngest staff photographer hired by Look magazine, carried his camera
on the subway for two weeks in 1946. The resulting illustrations, “Life and Love on the New York City
Subway,” Look, April 3, 1947, shared the motif and human-interest aspects of Evans self-assigned
project. Kubrick specifically focused on underground activities late at night, noting that passengers were
less inhibited between midnight and six a.m. (Mildred Stagg, “Camera Quiz Kid: Stan Kubrick,” The
Camera, October 1948, 36–41, 152, available online through ArchivioKubrick,

differentiate between hobbyists and professionals, and to classify professionals based on their intent (journalism, propaganda, commercial, artistic).

An array of accessories, including side-angle viewers, debuted alongside smaller camera models. Evans and fellow FSA-alumni Ben Shahn (1898–1969) appreciated the results of pairing a camera with a side-viewer. Shahn justified angle-camerawork and candid techniques as photographic equivalents to Honoré Daumier’s socially engaged art. If an artist’s goal was social reform, Shahn supported secretive methods. Evans also credited Daumier (1808–1879) as an inspiration and specifically cited *The Third-Class Carriage* (c. 1862–64; fig. 0.6) as an influential work for him. In praising the depiction of figures in an unselfconscious moment, Evans refers to *The Third-Class Carriage* as “a snapshot,” thus applying a photographic term to the realist’s painted travelers. Ralph Steiner, one of the few peers of whom Evans approved, although my discussion of candid techniques deals with Evans and Shahn’s commonalities, the two are more often cast as artistic foils. In his influential study of FSA photography, Gilles Mora uses Evans and Shahn to describe the two approaches used by Stryker’s photographic team. Evans’s FSA work is characterized by Mora based on the photographer’s use of large format cameras, frontal compositions, and the recurring presence of certain motifs (signs, printed text, mirrors, and empty interior spaces). Mora’s summary of Shahn’s FSA contribution highlights the experimental approach and small format cameras. Shahn often included markers of his Communist ideals and avoided the sentimental, traditional presentation of lower classes that appeared in his colleagues’ work. Gilles Mora, “The FSA’s Documentary Style: From Reportage to Vision,” in Mora and Beverly Brannan, *FSA: The American Vision* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2006), 265. Laura Katzman also provides a lengthy comparison between Shahn and Evans based on their representations of commercial photography studio window displays. “The Politics of Media: Painting and Photography in the Art of Ben Shahn,” in Katzman, Kao, and Webster, *Ben Shahn’s New York: The Photography of Modern Times* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). For more information on Shahn and his use of a side-viewer to take candid photographs, see Joel Smith, “We New Yorkers: The City in the Camera,” in *Modern Metropolis* (Poughkeepsie, NY: Vassar College, 2002), 3; “Unseen Photography” in *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance, and the Camera Since 1870*, ed. Sandra Phillips (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 19–23; *Ben Shahn’s New York* (2000), 57–9; and John Raeburn, *Ben Shahn’s American Scene: Photographs 1938* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 16.


232 In his description of *The Third–Class Carriage* Evans explained, “Although [Daumier] didn’t use a camera, he sketched those people on the spot, like a reporter, and they probably saw him doing it,” Katz, “Interview with Walker Evans,” 86. Mia Fineman astutely observed Evans’s pencil notations on envelopes of negatives resemble the caricatured “types” visually presented by Daumier. Her list of examples from the envelopes in the Walker Evans Archive: “Stenographer and Wallace Beery type,
made the relationship between Daumier and candid camerawork explicit by presenting pairs of illustrations—a detail of a painting by Daumier alongside a photographic depiction of the same subject—in *PM Weekly’s* June 30, 1940 issue. Steiner cautioned photographers against simple satisfaction in the ability to “catch an accidental gesture,” because “the good candid photographer should play the same part as a recorder of human thoughts and feelings as a painter such as Daumier played for his time.” Comparable to Newhall’s observation that documentary photography requires research and mental preparation, Steiner argued that a cameraman must patiently dedicate himself to the selection of vantage point, subject, and action.233 This emphasis on artistic intent, thoughtful devotion, and respect for Daumier as an exemplar of insightful imagery, marked the ways Evans and his peers judged the quality of a candid practitioner.

**TECHNIQUE AND DESIGN**

Evans’s earliest subway photos resulted from his experimentation with his 35mm Contax camera and candid methods.234 As noted by Deschin, photographers working underground faced exhausted workmen, Brooklyn youth, strange girls, sensitive young man, mother and child, nuns, two fat men, gypsy negress, Salvation Army lass, lesbians, sailor, Chinaman, virgin teaser girls, and Madonna of the social register.” Fineman, “Notes from the Underground,” 110–11.


234 For a summary of Evans’s working methods and materials, particularly his use of hand-held cameras, see Jerry L. Thompson, “Introduction,” Evans, *Walker Evans at Work*, 14. The type of film was another factor in determining the success of photography in dark locations. The subway series was made with Agfa Ultraspeed Panchromatic 35mm film. Twenty-five year-old Helen Levitt (1913–2009) acted as Evans’s “test” model for the initial subway portraits. Levitt introduced herself to Evans around this time to ask his opinion of her early photographs of children and chalk drawings on city streets. Like him, she admired Cartier-Bresson, befriended Agee and Shahn, and her work became an inspiration for 1960s
a litany of environmental obstacles. These challenges were compounded by Evans’s goal of taking photos unnoticed. In order to hide his equipment and appear innocuous, Evans made subway portraits during winter months when the bulk of his camera was indiscernible beneath a heavy coat. He painted his camera’s reflective chrome exterior elements black so they would not attract attention. A lens fit into a gap between two buttons on his coat and his body position dictated the camera’s view. He attached the shutter to a cable that ran down one sleeve so that the release rested in his palm. Evans’s furtive methods eliminated the option of using a flash bulb and the dimly lit car interiors required long exposures; he waited for the train to stop at stations so the slow shutter speed did not result in blurred images.

He compensated for the absence of a viewfinder by increasing the consistency of spatial depth. Throughout the series, the dominant viewpoint is from a bench seat facing directly across the aisle. Exposures made during his first year experimenting underground include a greater variety of vantage points and spatial distance, but only one of these “trial” images appears in Many Are Called; it serves as the book’s conclusion and will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

The camera’s lowered line of sight introduced another hurdle for the subway portraits, one not identified as a concern by Deschin—New York’s famous rush hours. On days when Evans

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235 Nine of the photographs published in Many Are Called (as well as several of the unpublished negatives in the Walker Evans Archive) are dated April–May, 1938 and May 1941. It is possible that these months were unusually brisk in 1938 and 1940, thus his layered attire was unremarkable. The figures depicted in the photos support this explanation because they sport hats, long sleeves, and jackets. See figure numbers 6, 7, 21, 33, 59, 62, 71, 72, and 77 in Evans, Many Are Called.
took subway portraits, he moved around the trains and cars in search of intriguing persons. Once he selected a sitter, he commandeered an inward-facing seat, his chest carefully aimed at his target. The twice-daily flood of commuters not only restricted his movements within a car, it also increased the likelihood of bodily interference between his camera-laden coat and unknowing sitter.

Unlike *American Photographs*, the subway series is not subdivided and the illustrations are all similar in size, scale, and orientation. The portraits’ consistent format and placement produces an overall feeling of continuity but their regularity also heightens subtle variances. If the eighty-nine images are glimpsed in the style of a flip-book, the viewer sees a shift in both the groundline and lighting from picture to picture. The visual effect mimics a passenger’s observations while traveling through subterranean tunnels. Alternately, the rapidly seen photographs are reminiscent of the view from a departing train; each blank page acts as a pillar (or a camera shutter) slicing the panoramic strips into multiple frames. This kinetic illusion, the result of a viewer’s external action, is absent when each photo is considered on its own; individually, Evans’s transit scenes are decidedly immobile.

Many Are Called adhered to the dominant compositional strategy of *American Photographs*. Kirstein’s 1938 introductory essay observed Evans’s avoidance of angle-shots and suggested that his straightforward perspective emphasized his work’s frank and factual nature. Aboard the subway, his equipment limited the depth of his focus but not the vantage point. Most contemporary examples of candid photography provided oblique or angled views of a subject.

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Evans’s hidden device allowed him to take pictures parallel to the sitter, thus preserving the visual element lauded in his work from earlier in the decade.

In On Photography, Sontag claimed the candid nature of Evans’s subway portraits is self-evident. She argued that the sitters’ expressions reveal the photographer’s secretive procedure, an accurate conclusion for most of the images in Many Are Called. The majority of the published subway portraits contain figures looking elsewhere—at overhead signs, reading material, or an unknown attraction beyond the camera’s view. Sixteen photos complicate Sontag’s assertion by presenting a passenger whose gaze directly confronts our own. At the time, these individuals stared at Evans, and their momentary infraction of public etiquette acts as a mirror and reminder of our own prolonged looking.

Two such photos, taken at the beginning and end of Evans’s surreptitious series display a similar quizzical countenance and suggest that it was not the photographer’s inexperience that attracted occasional curiosity. The earlier image, Man Beneath Pelham Bay Park Sign, shows a man seated in a zippered jacket (February 23, 1938; fig. 3.2). His cap rests on the back of his head, giving him a youthful and casual appearance. Evans cropped the photo to be square with the subject’s face at the center. The man’s head tilts slightly to his left; his brows furrow unevenly. The line of his closed mouth tips in the direction of his head, an eyebrow lifts slightly, and one cheek retracts a small amount. His muted, frozen expression implies intuitive suspicion.

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238 Sontag, On Photography, 37n. She goes on to describe the frontal pose adopted by formal portraiture as signifying “solemnity, frankness, the disclosure of the subject’s essence.”

239 Reproduced in Agee, “Walker Evans: Rapid Transit,” 22. The subway photographs were not titled for their publication or exhibition. Evans recorded descriptive titles on the film envelopes and these have been incorporated into bracketed titles in the Walker Evans Archive, Metropolitan Museum of Art. I am using abbreviated versions of these titles and include the Metropolitan’s extended identification in the list of figures.
A male passenger from January 1941 holds a similar bearing but from a perpendicular rather than parallel vantage point (fig. 3.3). The photographer again cropped the negative to place the face at the center of the print. *Man in Hat* shows an individual who turned over his left shoulder to examine Evans. His right hand holds his chin and cheek.240 A crease marks his forehead where his brows pinch. The furtive glance implies he peered toward the camera due to a noise or momentary distraction before returning to a straightforward pose.

What these photographs demonstrate is that Evans’s candid approach did not produce one of the key characteristics of popular candid camerawork—the subject’s obliviousness. Amateur practitioners of surreptitious picture taking prided themselves on a person’s unconcerned expression or at the very least an appearance of being caught off guard. Although Evans considered the subway a space where passengers were psychologically unguarded, his portraits do not always convey this condition.241 The cause for a sitter’s scrutinizing gaze remains a mystery, but the significance is that their perpetual stare, first exchanged with Evans and now directed at us, challenges the expectations of candid photography and intensifies our own awareness of optical etiquette then and now.242

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240 The *Man in Hat* is the only individual who appears twice in *Many Are Called*. Evans used the adjacent negative for the photograph ten pages after this one. In his second appearance, the man faces forward and is shown in profile. His hand remains at his face, but the adjusted pose is less skeptical than bored or fatigued.


242 Schivelbusch proposed the extended visibility of travelers aboard trains and their desire to maintain privacy and decorum led to the common practice of reading during rail journeys—a pastime that continues to occupy commuters on public transit; Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 70-88. Irving Lewis Allen reiterated the ideas of Walter Benjamin who “noted that before the development of buses and streetcars people had never been required to sit for long minutes looking at one another but not speaking. People dealt with this new situation of the uncomfortable eye, and sometimes body, contact by elaborating the culture of ‘civil inattention,’ as sociologist Erving Goffman called it. This new civility and conduct required one, among other things, not to stare, and to avoid brushing and pressing against others in proscribed ways in those close quarters. A new urban folklore arose about real and imagined
FEW TEXTS ARE CHOSEN

Evans did not resume his underground camerawork in 1939, but he expressed his continued interest in the project in his application for a Guggenheim Fellowship to create a nationwide survey of America through anonymous portraits. The 1939 proposal included two elements that had not been part of his initial subway pictures. He intended to use the funds to apply his candid portraiture methods across the country, and the resulting photos would be accompanied by text transcribed from conversations he overheard while shooting. When he reapplied for funds the following year, the 1940 project description provided more explicit details on the series, a number of which align with *Many Are Called*. The second application introduced the possibility of a book: “semiautomatic” portraits, ‘Faces of Men: A Collection of Unposed Portraits of Americans,’ made rapidly on the street with a hidden camera.” He intended to compile the works into a book that included essays and transcribed conversations of strangers. He received a fellowship in the spring of 1940 and an extension of funding through 1941; however illness prevented him from traveling across the country. Instead, he used the monies to return to his mass transportation series.

Using the photos taken between 1938 and 1941, Evans arranged the subway photographs into at least five groupings between 1956 and 1966. Three of these were published—*The

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245 Ibid. Additional Guggenheim funds allowed him to continue making transit photos in 1941. In April 1941 he received a six month extension to his fellowship.
In both 1956 and 1966, an untitled essay by Agee served as the written accompaniment to the images. Evans authored the statements printed alongside the photographs in *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1962 as well as five additional unpublished expositions on the series. The fact that his written statements were not selected for *Many Are Called*, suggests that despite his own attempts to compose an alternative, Evans considered Agee’s text (written in October 1940) to be best suited for publication.

Agee composed his response to the subway photographs three months before Evans’s final journey with his hidden camera. The title of the 1956 photo essay, “Rapid Transit,” appeared on a page adjacent to the first of eight photographs and provided readers with the setting before they encountered the images; Agee’s text appeared on the final page (fig. 3.4). Agee’s opening sentences clarify the location, time period, and method: “These photographs were made in the subway of New York City, during the late thirties and early forties of the

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247 The six unpublished and two published texts describing the subway photographs are reproduced in the Appendix of Greenough’s *Subways and Streets*. The same catalogue contains illustrations of the two-page spreads compiled as a maquette for *The Passengers*. Greenough, *Subways and Streets*, 28–37. Agee died in May 1955 and the use of his essay for the photographs’ inclusion in the March 1956 issue of *The Cambridge Review* makes sense because the issue was devoted to the late author. When Evans returned to the essay ten years later, he dedicated *Many Are Called to Agee*. By then, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* had been reissued (in 1960) and the two men’s names were associated through the influential documentary book.

248 Around this time, in the fall of 1940, Evans and Agee learned that after four years of rejections, Houghton Mifflin agreed to issue *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. It is also the same period when Evans submitted a Guggenheim proposal for a book with literary contributions and excerpts. Agee’s is the only known “literary” exegesis on the subway series.
twentieth century. The effort, always, has been to keep those who were being photographed as unaware of the camera as possible.” Agee lamented the limited number of people who “understand what a photograph can contain,” and then summarized the diversity of New Yorkers represented by Evans’s series.

Agee’s concluding paragraph described the behaviors used by people to conceal their inner selves from the external world: “[The subway passenger] has a wound and a nakedness to conceal, and guards and disguises by which he conceals it. Scarcely ever […] are these guards down. Before every other human being […] something of the mask is there.” He argued that these mental barriers only retract when a person sleeps, “or only in certain waking moments of suspension, of quiet, of solitude.”

Evans repeated his friend’s observation in the written passages for “The Unposed Portrait” (1962). The essay employs an uncharacteristically humble tone:

The crashing non-euphoria of New York subway life may someday be recorded by a modern day Dickens or Daumier. The setting is a sociological gold mine awaiting a

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249 Agee, “Walker Evans: Rapid Transit,” 25. His intended meaning of the term “always” is unclear. When Agee and Evans traveled to Alabama to gather stories and photograph sharecroppers, Evans was not using a hidden camera. Agee’s notion of false appearances in public spaces broadens the idea expressed by Marsh in “Metropolitan Explorer,” Yale Record (September 25, 1935), where he discussed his interest in subjects from lower classes because, “People of wealth spend money to disguise themselves.” (Scrapbook 1, clippings, Archives of American Art, Reginald Marsh Papers.) On Marsh’s classist views, see Kathleen Spies, “‘Girls and Gags’: Sexual Display and Humor in Reginald Marsh’s Burlesque Images,” American Art, no. 18 (Summer 2004): 51; and Carmenita Higginbotham, “Saturday Night at the Savoy: Blackness and the Urban Spectacle in the Art of Reginald Marsh” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2005), 27.


251 In Evans’s words, “The guard is down and the mask is off... people’s faces are in naked repose down in the subway,” Evans, “The Unposed Portrait”, 122. Luc Sante’s foreword to the 2004 edition of Many Are Called repeats Evans’s notion of subway riders as unmasked and exposed. According to Sante, “you can take off the face you wear for the benefit of others, let your posture go slack, allow your age and self-doubt and fatigue to resume the positions they occupy in the privacy of your own home. The subway rider, then, is naked,” Sante, “Foreword,” in Evans, Many Are Called, 11.
major artist […] Down in this swaying sweatbox he finds a parade of unselfconscious captive sitters, the selection of which is automatically destined by raw chance.  

Evans did not emphasize his prescient recognition of the subway’s artistic promise, though an astute reader may note that while he states this setting is awaiting a major artist, the author and photographer had already acted upon this idea twenty years earlier.

Agee’s 1940 text referred to the consistent effort to prevent subjects from realizing they were being photographed. He likely saw Evans’s ability to hide his camera beneath clothing as beneficial compared to the large format cameras used during the pair’s Alabama journey when the bulky photographic instrument reminded subjects they were under observation.  

In “The Unposed Portrait,” Evans described himself as “penitent” for his deceptive methods but noted, “the rude and impudent invasion involved has been carefully softened and partially mitigated by a planned passage of time. These pictures were […] deliberately preserved for publication.” Despite this qualified apology, Evans considered his pretensions and motives as “blameless,” and reiterated that any ethical dilemmas were resolved by the expanse of time and subject’s anonymity.  

When Evans remarked that the photo’s delayed presentation strengthened the sitter’s anonymity, he implied that anonymity acted as a shield against intrusive cameramen.

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252 Evans, “The Unposed Portrait,” 120.
253 Agee’s “Verses” and “Preamble” to Let Us Now Praise Famous Men referred to Agee and Evans as “spies, moving delicately among the enemy,” and “spies, guardians, and cheats,” Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, pp 4, 6.
254 Evans, “The Unposed Portrait,” 120.
255 “Now these people are forever dispersed, many are dead. I could not, with my scruples, impale them publicly at the time, however blameless my own pretensions and motive. But twenty-five years as instilled anonymity here. I am excused for serving up the compound unposed portrait of a milieu, a locale, and a delineated world of citizenry,” Walker Evans, “Twenty Thousand Moments under Lexington Avenue: A Superfluous Word,” (Draft text for a maquette of Lexington Avenue Local), 1966; reprinted in Sarah Greenough, Walker Evans: Subways and Streets (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 127.
The contradictory statements suggest Evans recognized the risk of audiences’ disapproval of his surreptitious approach. Evans’s understanding of photography’s potential to insult or repel coincides with comments Stryker made in 1940 about the FSA’s focus on rural, working class subjects:

Every so often, I am brought to the realization of the ruthlessness of the camera, particularly the way we have been using it. A lot of those people whose pictures you took do not realize how they are going to look in the eyes of the smug, smart city people when their pictures are reproduced. Of course, we could turn around and put the camera on the smug, smart city people and make them look ridiculous, too.256

Stryker’s observation, though not expressed to Evans, appropriately describes the photographer’s subway portraits. These captive passengers are the “smug, smart city people” who were accustomed to viewing their rural countrymen, not themselves.

Another of the unpublished texts, “People in a Subway” (1956–66), expounds on the series’ invasive quality. Evans acknowledged that well-mannered Americans abstain from staring and try to be uninterested in the appearances of strangers.257 In a resolute rejection of this public behavior, Evans’s concluding lines echo the advice Marsh gave to students in 1944: “Stare. It is the way to educate your eye, and more. Stare, pry, listen, eavesdrop. Die knowing something. You are not here long.”258 Both men advocated close observation of one’s

256 Stryker to Russell Lee, in Corpus Christi, TX, March 19, 1940, reprinted in Lesy, Long Time Coming, 325.


surroundings as a way to refine the artist’s ability to select meaningful subjects. And although neither artist identified mass transit as a space in which voyeurism was inevitable, their common interest in subway passengers and staring suggests they may have understood a correlation.

“CITIZENRY” IN CONTEXT

Many Are Called’s biblical title comes from the final passage of Matthew 22:14, Jesus’s parable of the banquet. “For many are called, but few are chosen,” refers to a king who invited everyone from his realm to attend the wedding of his son and then expels an attendee because the individual was improperly dressed (spiritually unprepared). For Evans’s subterranean portraits, the passage carries multiple meanings. Like the wedding guests, his subjects came from the general population. And like the king, Evans determined whom to photograph and which images to include in the published series.

In interviews later in life, Evans did not divulge the planning or deliberation that prevented the subway photos from being seen before 1956. He expressed his concern that the anonymity of his sitters would be impinged if the series had been published or exhibited earlier. In light of the contemporaneous events related to candid and documentary photography, and Evans’s career trajectory, it is reasonable to conclude that the passengers’ anonymity was not the sole reason the images went unseen for fifteen years. Evans’s return to the series as material for

Matthew 22:14 (American Standard Version). An alternate interpretation of this title results if Evans’s role as photographer is compared to the king’s servants, rather than the king himself. In the parable, the servants face multiple rejections and disappointments during their attempts to deliver the wedding invitation. Subway riders who did not hold a pose amenable to Evans’s hidden camera were inadvertently rejecting his photographic intentions. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men also bore a title taken from scripture.
publication suggests that either his “planned passage of time” had elapsed or that he wanted to solidify his legacy as street photography gained prominence.\footnote{260} The remainder of this chapter offers socio-historic interpretations of Evans’s transit portraits and relates these works to other artists’ representations of similar subjects. The following examples demonstrate that Evans strengthened his explanation of the images as unposed, unmasked portraits by distancing them from their original contexts.

Although some works reproduced in Many Are Called contain legible headlines, indications of external events are minimal. One image in Many Are Called hints at the proximity between New York City and the Navy Yard. *Sailor Beneath a Chesterfield Cigarette Advertisement* is a view of the corner of a subway car with two depicted persons—a uniformed traveler and a photograph of a model (January 25, 1941; fig. 3.5). Evans did not include the photo in the published or unpublished predecessors to Many Are Called, nor had the series’ previous incarnations contained a view of this location within a subway car.\footnote{261} For audiences in 1941, the setting and advertisement would have been immediately recognizable, and the sailor’s likeness would carry associations with the national defense industry, World War II, and the increasing danger faced in international waters.

\footnote{260} My suggestion that Evans strategically postponed the release of his subway photographs in part because he did not want them to be conflated with other visual trends in the late 1930s and then recognized their potential to verify his pioneering role in evolution of street photography is rooted in Maria Morris Hambourg’s observation, “It was Evans’s method, not only during the thirties, when he was making a name for himself, but throughout his career, to triangulate his position within the changing field. Scanning the lay of the land, he consciously or unconsciously sought and laid claim to the highest peak, aiming for preeminence not unlike that of Eliot or Joyce,” Hambourg, “A Portrait of the Artist,” *Walker Evans* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), 22.

\footnote{261} A similar view of a passenger seated in a corner below an advertisement appears in Marsh’s *Why Not Use the ‘L’*? (1930; fig. 1.1), Sloan’s *Reading in the Subway* (1926; fig. 1.5), and Freeman’s *The Letter Home* (c. 1937; fig. 2.6). In each of these works, the artist used the posted advertisement on the vertical partition to add meaning to the scene.
In *Sailor Beneath a Chesterfield Cigarette Advertisement*, the man’s face appears in the lower center of the frame. Dark curls of tousled hair fold over the white rim of the sailor’s cap. He appears in three-quarter pose, his head turned along with his body to face the length of the train as he leans against the interior wall. On the picture’s right side, a partition holds a cigarette ad featuring a smiling, glamorous young woman. The left half of the image contains a window overlaid by evenly spaced, horizontal slats. Their linear pattern directs attention back to the uniformed passenger and his two-dimensional companion. The lower register of the photograph is entirely in shadow; visual focus remains on the bright Navy cap and advertisement’s written enticement, “Chesterfield, Made for smokers like yourself.” In contrast to contemporary depictions of seamen seeking romantic encounters in the city, Evans’s scene emphasizes the man’s youth and isolation. This sailor is oblivious to the false invitations of the corporate model and turns instead to observe his fellow passengers.

In May 1941, New York Subways Advertising Company introduced a campaign that changed the way commuters related to the comely female faces posted inside railcars (fig. 3.6). A competition for women residents of New York, Miss Subways posters decorated subway and elevated train interiors for thirty-five years.\(^{262}\) Rather than pushing products, the overhead car-cards paired a headshot of the reigning transit queen with a short biography. Interested residents could send their information to John Robert Powers, a modeling agent who narrowed the possible candidates each month. Miss Subways provided local alternatives to the anonymous models or Hollywood starlets who dominated marketing and entertainment news.

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The innovative beauty competition inspired the Broadway musical *On the Town* (1944) in which a trio of sailors explores the Big Apple during their twenty-four-hour shore leave. Memorably portrayed in the 1949 film adaptation by Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, and Jules Munshin, the three seamen swoon over a Miss Turnstiles poster featuring Ivy Smith (played by Vera-Ellen). Miss Turnstiles, and her real-world counterpart, Miss Subways, symbolized an attainable role model for young women and an ideal romantic partner for men in the city.\(^{263}\)

Bernard Brussel-Smith produced a wood engraving of a Navy man beneath the city the same year as Evans’s *Sailor Beneath a Chesterfield Cigarette Advertisement*. Whereas Evans’s lone sailor remained motionless and contained in a corner seat, Brussel-Smith depicted unsettling views of military conduct in civilian spaces. The transit setting of *Shore Leave* (1941; fig. 3.7) is communicated through the signage overhead, discarded newsprint on the ground, and spherical candy dispenser attached to the central column.\(^{264}\) A woman in a light colored dress coyly resists the encircling grip of a dark-suited sailor while her back presses against a structural beam. The vertical support bisects the composition. On the opposite side of the column, a disinterested man

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\(^{263}\) *On the Town* (directed by George Abbott and choreographed by Jerome Robbins) premiered at the Adelphi Theater on December 28, 1944 and closed on February 2, 1946. MGM’s film version opened on December 8, 1949. In the scene where the three sailors gaze upon the two-dimensional Miss Turnstiles aboard the subway, they read the poster aloud: “Every month some lucky little New York miss is chosen from the thousands of girls who ride the subways to be Miss Turnstiles. She’s got to be beautiful, brilliant, talented—just an average girl! This month the fortunate lassie is—Miss Ivy Smith. She’s a home loving girl, but she loves high society’s world. She loves (goes out with) the army but her heart belongs to the navy. She’s studying painting at the museums and dancing at symphonic hall.” The impossible biography is an exaggerated version of Miss Subways captions, but it shows that although the campaign rewarded local young women, it perpetuated unrealistic gender roles.

\(^{264}\) The only hints and exact station location are partial words that resemble “Central,” “Lights,” and “Express.” Brussel-Smith also made *Sailor and His Girl* (1941), another woodblock print depiction of a predatory military figure groping a young woman. The setting is a bar rather than a station, but the interaction is equally (if not more) disconcerting. While the sailor pulls his attractive seatmate closer with one hand, the other cups her breast. Another artist interested in the subject of sailors approaching women in the city was Cecil C. Bell. Bell depicted the interactions between a red-headed, sultry civilians and young sailors in the paintings *Sailor’s Delight* (1945, Maimon Collection) and *Getting Acquainted at the El* (1943, location unknown).
sits with his hat lowered and cigarette burning. Brussel-Smith exploited the technical capabilities of wood engraving to achieve sharp contrasts and contours. The encroaching male figure is a dark form outlined in thin white lines and minimal shading. He leans toward the woman who turns from his advances and uses her left arm to simultaneously shift away and position her hand inside his arm. The most dramatic area of the picture is the juxtaposition of the couple’s faces. Her rouged lips and thick eye makeup intimate a simplified starlet. The sailor’s shadowed profile becomes a menacing silhouette against the face and hair of his counterpart. His open mouth, downturned eyes, pointed nose, and furrowed brow line convey lusty aggression. None of these characteristics is displayed by the sailor who sat across from Evans in January 1941, but the image could have sparked these and other associations based on the events surrounding World War II.

Agee’s essay on Evans’s subway photographs referred to the passengers’ dissimilar demographics, but racial diversity is not a hallmark of the 1966 publication. Only one person of color appears in the pages of Many Are Called. The African-American, shown in Man in Derby, sports a scarf, spectacles, a thin mustache, and rounded hat (January 13, 1941; fig. 3.8).265 His winter wardrobe is impeccable and stylish—a far cry from the disheveled traveler aboard Marsh’s Why Not Use the ‘L’? (fig. 1.1).266 While the spectrum of passenger’s skin tones is apparent in the series as a whole, Evans’s goals of objectivity may have influenced his reduction of racial diversity in Many Are Called. Unlike the depictions of African-Americans created by

265 The same image was published in Agee, “Walker Evans: Rapid Transit,” 17. Another photograph of a black male passenger (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994.253.577.1) was also included in “Rapid Transit: Eight Photographs,” 23, but was not reproduced in Many Are Called.

266 Fellow passengers would have likely associated Man in Derby with the stereotype of a “Zip Coon.” Higginbotham examines depictions of the black male body during the Depression and focuses on two dominant stereotypes of black men as either “Buck Nigger” or “Zip Coon,” the latter being an African-American, urban dandy. Higginbotham, “Saturday Night at the Savoy,” see especially Chapter 5, “Bums, The Bowery and the Black Male Body,” 205–57.
Marsh and Freeman, Evans’s focus on individuals prevents his photographs from illustrating racial contrasts aboard transit vehicles. In comparison, the experience of integrated travel was depicted by John Woodrow Wilson (1922–2015) and Palmer Hayden (1890–1973), both of whom were African-American.

Wilson, a Boston printmaker, used public transit as the setting to show a black man commuting to his job at the Navy Yard in *Elevated Streetcar Scene* (1945; fig. 3.9). The quiet, dignified image blends portraiture with urban genre. Presented from a vantage point in the vehicle’s central aisle, the composition centers on the male laborer seated in the foreground. A mother and child share his seat and appear on the right. On the left, receding along the length of the streetcar, two additional rows of passengers are visible. On the bench directly behind the foreground figures, sits a pair of fashionable young women engaged in muted conversation. An elderly woman with bagged groceries appears on the left edge and the most distant passenger is a man shown in profile as he surveys the street below. Wilson provided a view through a large window framing the mother and child; pedestrians and residents perform their daily routines on the sidewalks and stoops alongside the raised tracks.

In *Elevated Streetcar Scene*, Wilson captured the calm, handsome countenance of his primary subject. The man sits with his back straight, shoulders squared to the viewer, and his hands folded over his lunchbox on his lap. His worker identification badges are shown on his lunchbox and left lapel. Wilson used the motif of group travel to challenge discrimination and visualize African-American contributions during, and immediately after, the war. Marsh’s 1930 painting highlighted the stereotype of African-American men as lazy and discourteous, while also depicting the exhaustion of lower classes during the Depression. Evans’s *Man in Derby* does
not engage with either racial or economic contexts and the figure’s isolation successfully (for Evans) detaches him from social histories.267

Palmer Hayden’s *The Subway* (c. 1941; fig. 3.10) also centers on a black individual mid-journey; the main subject stares directly back at the viewer while surrounding faces are turned away or partially obscured.268 Hayden’s underground vehicle contains nine distinct figures and minimal empty space. He depicted a range of skin tones across the seated and standing travelers. A black hat in the upper left corner accentuates the dark skin of Hayden’s primary figure. The central man holds a pole with his right hand and spreads his feet slightly apart to maintain balance aboard the moving train. Immediately on the other side of the pole from his impassive face is another African-American man shown in profile. Although only his head is visible, the green and red hat signals his military position, and like *Elevated Streetcar Scene*, the work shows black citizen’s contributions to national defense.

While Evans reiterated the subway photos as unposed, anonymous portraits removed from historical context, his selection of images and inclusion of *Man in Derby* in two publications suggests the subway’s diverse ridership was important to the project. Evans’s

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267 The full negative, visible through the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s online collection, reveals a black woman wearing a fur stole sat close to the man’s right. Their relationship is impossible to surmise because the borders of the image are too dark (likely obscured by Evans’s coat). By removing the neighboring passenger, Evans’s *Man in Derby* becomes more anachronistic and less embedded in issues of racial integration in the 1940s or the civil rights movement twenty years later when it reappeared in Agee, “Walker Evans: Rapid Transit,” and Evans, *Many Are Called*.

268 Although the date of this work is uncertain, Hayden’s depiction of a black soldier was painted around the same time the issue of discrimination and national defense led President Roosevelt to sign Executive Order 8802 (June 25, 1941) banning discrimination in defense industries. Scholars assign different dates to this work, including Higginbotham who used “c. 1935” in her dissertation and “1940” in her 2015 publication. I am assigning the date as circa 1941 based on a preparatory sketch for the painting in Palmer Hayden papers, box 5, folder 3, frame 10, Archives of American Art. During the same period when Hayden painted his view of New York’s commuters and Evans made his candid series, influential black bandleader Duke Ellington composed two songs in which the subway’s speed and sound are associated with progress and opportunity: *Daybreak Express* (1935) and *Take the ‘A’ Train* (1939).
preference for individual portraits avoided the evocation of racial contrasts by maintaining the visual segregation of his passengers. His subway photographs evoke isolation by showing a solitary figure. In some instances, Evans cropped out the subject’s traveling companion(s). In others, he waited until the seats on either side of the intended sitter cleared. In contrast, Wilson and Hayden’s artworks demonstrate their interest in the racial “mixing-pot” of mass transit.

**SUBWAY NOISE**

Another of Evans’s unpublished texts referred to the “almost peaceful, restful” atmosphere of the subway in 1941. As part of his nostalgic, sensorial description of mass transit he identified a single passenger, “the inevitable familiar inventive blind man making his way down the rocking aisle.” This figure appears as the final photo in *Many Are Called* and differs from the rest of the series in multiple ways (fig. 3.11). In addition to being the only image in the publication in which the vantage point is the center of a car, *View Down Subway Car with Accordionist Performing in Aisle* also depicts a multitude of passengers, and stands out as an emphatically sonic representation of public travel. While contemporary sources show Evans and his peers usually described the subway’s unpleasant loudness, his visual records all but omit the presence of people reacting to, or partaking in aural stimuli.

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269 The display of integrated spaces from decades earlier may have provoked strong responses from viewers in 1956, 1962, and 1966.

270 Evans’s sensorial description recalls, “those rattling, roaring cars, the noise, the sense of speed, useful motion, the smell, the thousands of small human incidents, the inevitable familiar inventive blind man making his way down the rocking aisle,” untitled draft text for publication of subway photographs (1956–66) in Greenough, *Subways and Streets*, 125.

The historical context for *Accordionist Performing in Aisle* sheds light on its significance within the series and in relation to similar depictions of physically impaired, socially neglected, subjects. During the Great Depression, buskers and street musicians became symbols of the common man’s struggle to earn money. Their financial plight came into direct conflict with the growing concern over the sensorial onslaught, or what sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918) defined as urban perception. Efforts to reduce noise in American cities began in the late nineteenth century and became increasingly common after 1900.

Mayor Fiorello La Guardia’s “War on Noise” lasted a decade, from 1935 to 1945. The program, led by the League of Less Noise, studied the causes and solutions to New York City’s aural nuisances. Many of the League’s ideas were based on a 1930 survey performed for the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*. When the city’s Commissioner of Health created a panel to study the issue in 1930, the resulting publication, *City Noise*, identified traffic and transportation as key sources. Widely distributed articles and graphs from *City Noise* heightened attention to the harmful consequences of New York’s “diabolical symphony.”

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sonic intrusions originated from transit—trucks, automobiles, buses, motorcycles, horns, brakes, defective mufflers, whistles, sirens, bells, trolleys, trains, subways, els, turnstiles, rickety wheels, metal bodies, and defective switches and joints.\textsuperscript{275} La Guardia’s administration considered educational campaigns, traffic laws, city planning, and transportation construction projects (including the destruction of the el) as remedies for unwanted sounds.

The crux of the debate over America’s rising decibel level was how to define noise. For those seeking to control the urban sonic environment, noise “referred to conflict and complexity, rudeness, wildness, primitiveness, irrationality, impressive behavior and revenge. Notwithstanding such variety, noise meant chaos, silence meant order, and rhythm meant control within and over societal life.”\textsuperscript{276} Robert Hawk\textsc{\textsuperscript{in}}’s 2012 article for the Journal of Social History focused on the impact of La Guardia’s policies on street musicians and explained the ways anti-noise legislation incorporated ethnic stereotypes and evolving judgments of what qualified as work. The Mayor’s War on Noise was also a charge against willful dependency.

Contemporary depictions of how members of the lowest classes appeared amid transit settings help tease apart the interwoven issues of begging, busking, and underemployment. Albert Potter’s Modern Music (1933–36; fig. 1.13) offers an alternative view of New York’s street musicians. The Works Project Administration print contains three destitute citizens aboard a packed train car. Jagged edges, asymmetry, and diagonals proliferate throughout the mobile space. Three foreground figures represent the city’s comfortable middle classes. Behind them,


\textsuperscript{275} This list of intrusive noises combines the categories of “traffic” and “transportation” from the City Noise report. Bijsterveld, “The Diabolical Symphony,” 176–8.

\textsuperscript{276} Bijsterveld, “The Diabolical Symphony,” 183.
standing in the aisle on the upper left side of the picture, a man and woman ask for donations. She holds an upturned baby while her partner runs a bow along his shoulder-held violin. The invocation for “Emergency Unemployment Relief” lies immediately above the vagrant’s violin and redirects attention toward his grizzled features and skeletal smile.

In light of the 1935 laws, La Guardia expected men like those depicted by Potter and Evans to seek paid employment. If no jobs were available, then these noisy citizens were required to register for government aid rather than procure supplemental income. Thus for audiences in 1930s and 1940s New York, Accordionist Performing in Aisle would have depicted mechanical and human culprits of the city’s aural disruption.

Evans’s sightless performer harkens back to Paul Strand’s Blind Woman (1916; fig. 3.12), a photograph Evans’s described as a “powerful picture” in a 1929 letter to Hans Skolle after encountering the piece in the New York Public Library’s Camera Work files. A young Evans concluded, “That’s the stuff, that’s the thing to do.”

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277 This instrument may either be a violin or a fiddle.

278 Two earlier legal cases against street musicians appeared in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle and assist in our understanding of street performers in the 1930s. In 1932, three subway musicians (a banjoist, accordionist, and singer) were charged with disorderly conduct but were not penalized apart from the judge’s instruction to limit their concerts to open air spaces. His verdict came after requiring the three men to play for a small group of newspaper reporters and court staff in the judge’s chambers. The following year, a duo featuring an accordionist and violinist would have suffered a two dollar fine, were it not paid by a local attorney on their behalf. They were tried at the request of BMT passengers and employees who considered their efforts annoying and unwelcome. “Jury of newspaper men frees trio of Subway Musicians,” Brooklyn Daily Eagle, September 3, 1932, 2; and “Subway Musicians’ Earnings Saved by Bay Ridge Lawyer,” Brooklyn Daily Eagle, July 12, 1933, 31.

279 Evans’s letter to Hans Skolle, 28 June 1929; reproduced in Evans, Walker Evans at Work, 24. For Evans’s comments on Blind Woman see Katz, “Interview with Walker Evans,” and Oral history interview with Walker Evans (1971). The opinions he expressed in these interviews are included in Szarkowski, “Introduction,” http://www.masters-of-photography.com/E/evans/evans_articles3.html; Hambourg, “A Portrait of the Artist,” 17; and Fineman, “Notes from the Underground,” 111. Sontag also identified Strand’s streetside portrait as definitive moment in photography. In her estimation, “Portrait photographers earn their income from famous faces, and then ‘search for ‘real’ faces, generally sought among the anonymous, the poor, the socially defenseless, the aged, the insane—people indifferent to
Evans produced their portraits of blind individuals as part of their independent experiments taking photographs without their subjects’ knowledge, a pursuit assisted by a subject’s inability to see. Like the passengers displayed on the pages of *Many Are Called*, visually impaired individuals are perpetually observed.

Shahn and Evans shared an address and studio space for several years but it was not until 1933 that Shahn began making photographs. He later recounted his desire to capture the likeness of a blind musician who regularly traversed the streets surrounding Union Square (fig. 3.13). In Shahn’s untitled photograph, a hefty accordionist appears amidst a crowd of onlookers. His severely pocked skin contrasts with the deep shadows beneath his eyebrows; his head tips downward as if in concentration or deference. The piano accordion rests against his chest, its latticed grille and keyboard act as protective armor between the musician and his audience.

Minna Citron’s *She Earns ‘An Honest Living’* (1934; fig. 3.14) shows a solitary woman sitting on a box with her back against a subway platform pillar. The sunken tracks recede diagonally from the lower right to the upper left of the picture. The cylindrical tunnel frames her face which is partially shaded by the brim of her hat. A small stack of newspapers rests on her

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(or powerless to protest) the camera’s aggressions. Two portraits that Strand did in 1916 of urban casualties, “Blind Woman” and “man” are among the first results of this search conducted in close-up,” *Sonntag, On Photography*, 104. Strand’s use of a decoy lens to photograph people on the street is mentioned in Fineman, “Notes on the Underground,” 111.

Shahn purchased a used Leica in 1933 and published his first photographs in “Scenes from the Living Theater—Sidewalks of New York,” *New Theater* 1 (November 1934) 18–9. Shahn and his family moved to 333 West Eleventh Street in November 1934, but he continued to frequent the Bethune Street studio where Evans worked until the following year. On the two men’s cohabitation and Shahn’s early motivations for making photographs, see *Oral history interview with Walker Evans* (1971) and Harlan Phillips’ interview with Shahn (October 3, 1965), Archives of American Art. Another example of a blind musician photographed around this time: Andrew Herman, *Blind Beggars*, (1940, Federal Art Project) Museum of the City of New York. The Museum of the City of New York also has a substantial number of photographs showing the activities and services of the New York Association for the Blind which had multiple workshops and boarding houses in New York City, trained individuals in music and education, and set up newsstands operated by blind individuals.
lap, held in place by her left arm. The vendor’s right hand rests in her pocket. Her feet turn slightly inward and appear small in relation to her bulky coat. The work’s title and subject’s comportment convey Citron’s empathetic view of lower class women. In an interview Citron discussed the painted version of this work in emblematic terms:

The thirties was a period of emerging, especially for women. Women were changing from being housebound; from being chattels of their fathers and husbands. Into what? There were few jobs for anyone, fewer still for women… There was no model for [She Earns ‘An Honest Living’]. The woman in this picture is archetypal. She represents the psychology of many women of the day—without training—women had to reevaluate their thinking and lives.

Citron’s subway vendor is marked not only by her gender and low wages, but also by a literal lack of vision, an inability to see the empty platform or her altered social positon. The lack of model and intended symbolism of the subject set this painting at odds with Evans’s concept of “documentary style” photography.

The female subjects depicted in She Earns ‘An Honest Living’ and Strand’s Blind Woman remain stationary and isolated. In contrast, Shahn and Evans both photographed unseeing musicians in mid-procession. Their sonically charged images convey motion and performance. While blind subjects could not ascertain the camera’s presence, the two accordionists sought attention and compensation from their audiences.

These interpretations demonstrate the myriad of social and political issues embedded in Evans’s series, issues that were diluted and forgotten over time. In order to convincingly present Many Are Called as the disinterested project he intended, Evans kept his transit views private.

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until the audience also achieved the optimal level of disinterest. While Freeman and Marsh (in his early career) emphasized the specificity of their settings by including signage or transcribed headlines, Evans valued the mobile spaces for their predictable behaviors and procedures. His subway portraits resulted from a desire to apply candid methods to unknown and unaware subjects, persons who were engaged in a routine activity and accepted their transitory state.
Figure 3.1
Jacob Deschin
*In the Subway*, n.d.
Illustration for “Candid Photography,” *Scientific American* 152 (May 1935): 250

“In the Subway.” An interesting character study taken underground. Exposure made at 1/20 of a second with a diaphragm opening of f/2
Figure 3.2
Walker Evans
*Man Beneath Pelham Bay Park Sign*, February 23, 1938
Reproduced in *Many are Called* (1966), 4
Figure 3.3
Walker Evans
*Untitled* [Subway Passengers, New York City] *Man in Hat*, January 25, 1941
Film negative
35mm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Walker Evans Archive, 1994.253.613.2
Reproduced in *Many are Called* (1966), 75
Title assigned based on Evans’s pencil notation for the previous frame.
Figure 3.4  
Walker Evans  
“Rapid Transit,” The Cambridge Review (March 1956): 16–17 (left); 24–25 (right)
Figure 3.5
Walker Evans
*Untitled [Subway Passengers, New York City: Sailor Beneath a Chesterfield Cigarette Advertisement on Times Square Shuttle]*, January 25, 1941
Film negative
35mm
Reproduced in *Many Are Called* (1966), 83
Figure 3.6
New York Subways Advertising Company
Miss Subways (Mona Freeman), May–September 1941
Poster
Figure 3.7
Bernard Brussel-Smith
*Shore Leave*, 1941
Wood engraving
6 1/8 x 4 inches
Edition of 50
David Owsley Museum of Art at Ball State, Gift of Ned and Gloria Griner, 2005.043.008
Figure 3.8
Walker Evans
*Untitled [Subway Passengers, New York City: Man in Derby]*, January 13, 1941
Film negative
35mm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Walker Evans Archive, 1994.253.590.1
Reproduced in *The Cambridge Review* (March 1956): 17 and *Many are Called* (1966), 49
Figure 3.9
John (Woodrow) Wilson
_Elevated Streetcar Scene_, 1945
Lithograph
11 1/4 x 14 3/4 inches
Also known as _The Passing Scene_ or _Street Car Scene._
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Reba and Dave Williams, 1999.529.198
Figure 3.10
Palmer C. Hayden
*The Subway*, c. 1941
Oil on canvas
31 x 26 inches
Collection of the New York State Office of General Services, Harlem State Office Building
(location unverified)
Date based on sketch in Palmer Hayden Papers, box 5, folder 3, frame 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Figure 3.11
Walker Evans, *Untitled [View Down Subway Car with Accordionist Performing in Aisle, New York City]*, February 25, 1938
Film negative
35mm
Reproduced in *Many are Called* (1966), 89
Figure 3.12
Paul Strand
*Photograph - New York (Blind Woman)*, negative 1916; print June 1917
Photogravure
8 13/16 x 6 9/16 inches
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 93.XB.26.53
Figure 3.13
Ben Shahn
Fourteenth Street - Blind Accordionist
Ben Shahn Papers, photographs: New York City 1932–1936, box 34, folder 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Figure 3.14
Minna Citron
She Earns ‘An Honest Living’, 1934
Etching
5 7/8 x 3 3/8 inches
Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Eisenstein
Indeed, to talk about ‘the passenger’ in the singular risks collapsing the difference and singularity of lived experience of being in passage into an undifferentiated, generic and politically-problematic composite. Yet, at the same time, and perhaps in consolation, ‘the passenger’ also signals the anonymous, the unknown, the uncertain and the unidentifiable existences of being in passage.


In their article “Profiling the Passenger,” Peter Adey and his colleagues investigated the principal function of the person mid-transit in mobility studies. The passenger, they argue, is a figure reliant upon a larger assemblage and system; to study a figure in passage is to grapple with the contradictory forces of stillness and motion, solitude and cooperation. When examined, these individuals provoke issues of “the anonymous, the unknown, the uncertain and the unidentifiable,” a fitting profile for the travelers represented by Reginald Marsh, Don Freeman, and Walker Evans.283 This dissertation used these artists’ work to demonstrate the multivalent nature of transportation motifs and explore the ways this body of images relates to the experience of group travel.

The illusory characteristics of a passenger correspond to the ambiguous location they inhabit. As described by Wolfgang Schivelbusch and Shelley Rice, the experience of train travel introduced unique behaviors and visual phenomena into European society. Their notions of “in-between space” and “nonspace” help to single out the mobile vehicle as distinctive in theory and

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practice. Scholarly investigations of the railroad in nineteenth-century American landscape paintings also laid a foundation for this study, by contextualizing a recurring artistic feature and shedding light on the perception and symbolism of a machine navigating North American terrain.

When viewed holistically, images of mass transit from the early to mid-twentieth century display environments replete with texts, overburdened vehicles, and weary figures. These features speak to the historical context of the 1930s and 1940s when the United States gradually recovered from financial collapse and agricultural crisis, and then supplied an immense war effort. Artist’s inclusion of headlines, advertisements, and signage enable viewers to identify a location geographically or temporally. For Marsh and Freeman the depiction of passengers’ reading material often paid homage to each artist’s commercial employers. In Evans’s subway portraits, embedded text was cropped out when it distracted from the purity of his project, but it was ultimately included in Many Are Called as a historical marker—a reminder to audiences in 1966 that the “penitent spy’s” activities were twenty-five years in the past.

The crowds presented by many urban artists became more compressed in mobile spaces. Rush hours, subway mashers, and crammed subway cars provided plentiful opportunities for writers and visual artists to respond to the modern environment. Marsh lost interest in the commuting crowds early in his career and chose to recycle a solitary female figure in generic subway settings. Freeman regularly celebrated the throngs of Broadway theatre-goers but often focused his transit imagery on isolated characters. Evans’s method prevented him from taking pictures during the subway’s busiest times, but even in View Down Subway Car with

Accordionist Performing in Aisle (fig. 3.11), there is a multisensory gap between the central subject and his fellow passengers.

Travel fatigue allowed artists in the 1930s and 1940s to comment on the weariness of the masses. As with many of the features of mass transit in the early twentieth century, it continues to be a common sight today. The presence of dormant passengers in transportation spaces also serves to reiterate their lack of movement. The nonspaces shown by Marsh, Freeman, and Evans emphasize stasis rather than velocity.

Figures suspended between origin and destination, settings that are fundamentally public but can also be intimate—these qualities are familiar to my own experience of transit and they did not go unnoticed by artists in the previous century. It is the ordinariness of American movement that makes its visual presence deceptively easy to overlook. Transportation continues to be a consistent subject for journalists, particularly those working in New York and other major metropolitan areas.

The longevity and proliferation of transportation in American art is difficult to grasp without viewing a large number of illustrations. Surveying thousands of images based on

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common motif risks promoting superficial observations rather than historical insight. In order to successfully include close formal observations and biographical research into this project, a great multitude of transit images were omitted. Artists that would strengthen future discussions of transportation include Stuart Davis, Joseph Stella, Charles Sheeler, and Jacob Lawrence. The FSA/OWI file contains several series of photographs dedicated to modes of travel or representative locations.288

As seen in the introductory photograph, *Toward Los Angeles, California* (fig. 0.4), roadways and pedestrians featured prominently in the both the FSA file and the national perception of the Dust Bowl and its refugees. A more complete understanding of mobility during the 1930s and 1940s would include imagery from rural and mid-sized American towns where buses and walking predominated. Lange’s photograph also hints and the importance of race in examinations of America’s mobile past; transportation’s accessibility can expand into the visual culture surrounding the use of public transit and interstate travel during the Civil Rights Movement.

This dissertation demonstrates that artists in the 1930s and 1940s used transportation motifs as recognizable subjects for their audiences. As such, Marsh, Freeman, and Evans chose to amplify or downplay the specificity of the setting depending on their artistic goals.

288 Marjory Collins, Jack Delano, and Esther Bubley each repeatedly photographed transportation or travelers. These photographs have the additional benefit of incorporating additional cities into the discussion of mass transit, although all three photographers also turned their cameras to the New York transit system at least once during their career.
APPENDIX A

Map of Lower Manhattan

APPENDIX B
Chronology of Reginald Marsh’s Transit Images (1928–1941)

The following list of Marsh’s transportation paintings and prints is based on his written accounts, photographs of works contained in his scrapbooks, exhibition catalogues, the online collections of the Museum of the City of New York, http://collections.mcny.org/C.aspx?VP3=CMS3&VF=Home, and Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/reginald-marsh-papers-9072


3. **Subway**, December 1928. Etching, 10 7/8 x 6 7/8 inches.


8. **BMT (#3)**, May 4–November 10, 1929. Etching, 7 7/8 x 9 7/8 inches. Sasowsky 62. (Sketch similar to this appeared as illustration “In the Subway” in *Brooklyn Eagle Magazine*, November 3, 1929, 8.)


10. **BMT (#1)**, November 28–December 22, 1929. Etching, 6 x 9 inches. Sasowsky 60.

11. “**Another Subway Scene**,” illustration in *Brooklyn Eagle Magazine*, November 3, 1929, 9

12. **BMT Elevated**, 1929. Etching, 4 x 5 inches. Plate destroyed. (Alternate titles: *BMT, On the BMT.*


25. *The Date*, May 7–October 31, 1932. Egg yolk over [green acrylic?] underpainting and stand oil. 18 x 24 inches. Location unknown. (Alternate titles: *BMT station with Flapper, Waiting in Subway, BMT station at 42nd Street.*)


30. *Unknown* (woman seated on subway), c. 1938. Painting, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. Photograph at Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.93.5C.
31. **Woman at Times Square Subway Station** (possible study for *500,000 Czechs on Nazi Border*), 1938. Watercolor, charcoal, and gouache on paper, 21 x 15 inches. Location unknown. Photograph at Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.87.4B.


33. **Unknown** (two women on subway platform near Fourteenth Street station sign), c. 1938. Painting, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. Photograph at Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.87.4C. Same composition as another unknown painting c.1939, location unknown. Photograph at the Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.2.4E.

34. **Hitler Escapes**, October 1939. Watercolor, 40 x 26 inches. Location unknown.

35. **Girl in Pink Suit**, 1940. Maroger medium, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. (Possibly the same as *Subway Girl (Picture #18)*, October 7, 1940. Painting, 22 x 36 inches, or *Zayda in the Pink Suit*, April 14, 1941. Painting, 12 x 16 inches. (Alternate title: *Zayda in the Subway*.)

36. **Unknown** (woman leaning on pillar, holding paper), 1940. Painting, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. Photograph at Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.93.4A. (Similar to *Girl in Pink Suit*.)

37. **Unknown** (woman leaning on pillar, reading paper, with trash can behind), c. 1940–42. Painting, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. Photograph at the Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.18.3E. Same composition as another unknown painting, c. 1944, location unknown. Photograph at Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.70.1E.

38. **Zayda in Subway (Demonstration plate)**, 1940. Engraving, 6 x 4 inches. Sasowsky 193.


40. **Unknown** (stairs, woman, and mad on right), c. 1941. Painting, dimensions unknown. Location unknown. Photograph at the Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.93.4B.

41. **Girl in White Subway Seat**. April 14, 1941. Painting, 5 x 7 inches. Destroyed. (Possibly shown in photograph from Museum of the City of New York, 90.36.2.93.6E.)

42. **Easter on the IRT**, April 14, 1941. Maroger medium, 15 x 18 inches. Location unknown.
APPENDIX C

Publication history of Don Freeman’s *Newsstand*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>COVER ILLUSTRATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 1936</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 01</td>
<td>[Man in newsstand]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1936</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 02</td>
<td>[Man in newsstand wearing a scarf]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1937</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 03</td>
<td>[Self-portrait sketching]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1937</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 04</td>
<td>[Flower vendor on horseback]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1937</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 05</td>
<td>[LaGuardia boxing Tammany tiger]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1938</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 06</td>
<td>[Easter, subway guard]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1938</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 07*</td>
<td>[Pink and yellow ‘leaves’ of paper]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1939</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 08</td>
<td>[Children looking in toy store window]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1939</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 09</td>
<td>[Boy on subway with wreath, Success]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1940</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 10</td>
<td>[Stage curtain being lifted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1941</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 11</td>
<td>[Carolers kicked out of restaurant]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1941</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 12</td>
<td>[Flower vendor on foot]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1941</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 13</td>
<td>[Kite flying over laundry lines]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1941</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 14</td>
<td>[Red and yellow portrait sketches]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1943</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 15</td>
<td>[Broadway blackout]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( <em>Newsstand</em> published in <em>P.M.</em> June- July, 1943 and June 1944)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>September 1944</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 16</td>
<td>[Soldier on an upper bunk]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1948</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 17</td>
<td>[Uncle Sam sees a psychiatrist]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1950</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 18**</td>
<td>[“Special safety pin issue”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1954</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 19</td>
<td>[San Francisco trolley]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1955</td>
<td><em>Newsstand</em> 20</td>
<td>[Bus stop and tow truck in Los Angeles]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This issue was not included on Roy Freeman’s list of *Newsstands*.

** This issue appears on Roy Freeman’s list of *Newsstands* but does not appear in the Don Freeman Papers, reels LA9 and 76, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., nor has it been verified through other collections.
APPENDIX D

Chronology of Walker Evans’s Subway Photographs and Events Related to the Creation or Publication of Evans’s Subway Portrait Series

*Brackets indicate events and publications related to the series.


March 17, 1938: Evans takes photographs in the New York subway

April 28, 1938: Evans takes photographs in the New York subway

May 5–8, 1938: Evans takes photographs in the New York subway

May 27, 1938: Evans takes photographs in the New York subway

[September 28–November 18, 1938: *American Photographs* exhibition at MoMA]

[1939: Evans applies for Guggenheim fellowship to photo “American Scene”]

[Spring 1940: Evans receives Guggenheim fellowship to take street photos]

May 1940: Evans takes photographs in the New York subway

October 1940: James Agee writes essay that is published with subway photographs as “Rapid Transit” (1956) and *Many Are Called* (1966)

Winter 1940: Evans takes photographs in the New York subway

January 7–11, 13–27, 1941: Evans takes photographs in the New York subway


1956–66: Evans authors four unpublished texts for the subway photographs:

- “People in the Subway: Unposed Portraits Recorded by Walker Evans”
- [Untitled draft text for publication of subway photographs]
• “Unposed Photographic Records of People”
• “The Passengers (Hidden Camera in the New York Subway)” (1958-66)


[1965: Evans retires from professional photography]


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“Unemployed Arts.” *Fortune,* May 1937.


Vidor, King. The Crowd. VHS. MGM, 1928.


VITA

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. Candidate, Art History, The Pennsylvania State University (University Park, PA), 2016
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Curatorial Assistant, Palmer Museum of Art, Fall 2011
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FELLOWSHIPS, & AWARDS

2012 Robert Lehman Foundation Fellowship, Rockwell Center for American Visual Studies
2012 Institute for the Arts & Humanities Graduate Student Residency, Pennsylvania State University
2012 Art History Dissertation Fellowship, Pennsylvania State University
2010 Art History Travel Grant, Pennsylvania State University
2008–11 Merit Assistantship, Pennsylvania State University, Department of Art History
2007–8 University Graduate Fellowship, Pennsylvania State University Graduate School
2003–5 Merit Assistantship, American University, College of Arts and Sciences
1999–2003 Hollins Scholar, Hollins University (full tuition scholarship)

PUBLIC LECTURES & PRESENTATIONS

“Three Artists on the Move (Reginald Marsh, Don Freeman, and Esther Bubley),” Norman Rockwell Museum, Stockbridge, MA, April 2013
“Unsettled Masses: Transportation in American Art During the 1930s and 1940s,” Association of Historians of American Art, October 2012
“Artists, Commuters, and America in Transit,” graduate symposium paper, Art of Travel, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, March 2012
“Waiting for Arrival: Mass Transit in American Art from the 1930s and 1940s,” graduate conference paper, Art and Struggle, OCAD University, Toronto, Canada, March 2012
“Esther Bubley’s Boarding Houses,” professional conference presentation, Creative Action: Gender and the Arts, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, March 2006