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McClellan Street

By David and Peter Turnley

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. Pp. xii, 107. Illustrations. \$29.95)

In the fall, I will be eager to bring *McClellan Street* by David and Peter Turnley into my photography classes, and I can imagine talking about it with my students. So stop texting for a few minutes, students, and let's take a look at this very interesting book.

Twin brothers David and Peter Turnley were only seventeen when they decided in 1973 to photograph McClellan Street in their hometown of Ft. Wayne, Indiana. At first, they shared one camera and passed it back and forth. They returned to McClellan Street often, developed relationships with their subjects, and earned their trust. There is an intimacy in these photographs that reflects the time that the Turnleys spent and the access they gained. The first lesson to be learned from this book: these photographers clearly defined their subject and dug into the project with great commitment.

The second lesson: While there was nothing newsworthy or dramatic about this street and the people living there, the Turnley brothers clearly thought that careful observation could reveal the significance of the details of ordinary working-class life.

Much of the best documentary photography uncovers significance, interest, and beauty, after all, in the commonplace. Photography can remind us to pay attention to everything around us.

In this case, the passage of almost forty years adds so much. These photographs hold so many small details from their historical moment – the cars, clothes, postures, and all the cigarettes. Documentary photographs gain value as the world changes, and ordinary details become interesting and poignant. As the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson said, if the photograph wasn't made, you can't print and look at a memory. It's important to get out there and photograph our time. Thus *McClellan Street's* third lesson: descriptive photographs get more interesting as time passes.

The brothers cite as their inspiration the 1955 exhibition and book, *The Family of Man*, which stressed the common humanity of all people. The photographs from that collection have been revered, yet also derided as portraying a view of life that is too simple and predictable. For young and idealistic photographers like the

Turnleys *The Family of Man* must have been a powerful model, and indeed we can see some echo of that work in *McClellan Street's* passionate interest in people's lives. But perhaps the influence also shows in some images that are not particularly unusual or complex – straightforward photographs of apparently happy people smiling at the camera. Fortunately, most of the photographs in *McClellan Street* go beyond a simple well-intentioned gesture toward shared humanity. They describe a complicated and gritty environment and offer the viewer images of people with complex relationships and mixed feelings. These tougher photographs are often quite wonderful – employing complicated picture structures and unexpected viewpoints – pictures that one would not expect from seventeen-year-old photographers. We all start our own work with the model of an admired previous work in mind; perhaps this book of early work from two distinguished photographers offers a good example of how our subsequent work can

build upon yet grow distinct from that foundation.

Separately, David and Peter Turnley have published many books, covered important world events, and won awards. All young photographers (like my students) see highly successful careers like theirs and wonder how to start down that road. This book is one fantastically interesting example of two exceptional careers beginning: young brothers working hard to discover the world, photography, and their own talents.

BOB THALL is professor in and former chair of the Department of Photography at Columbia College Chicago. He is the author of *The Perfect City* (1994); *The New American Village* (2000); *City Spaces: Photographs of Chicago Alleys* (2002); and *At City's Edge: Photographs of Chicago's Lakefront* (2005). His photographs are in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Canadian Centre for Architecture, and the Museum of Modern Art, among others.



The Calumet Region *An American Place*

Photographs by Gary Cialdella, edited by Gregg Hertzlieb, essays by Gregg Hertzlieb, Gary Cialdella, and John Ruff

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. Pp. 118. Photographs. \$39.95.)

Calumet-area native Gary Cialdella experienced firsthand the Region's heyday, as well as the changes brought on by the demise of its once-

thriving industrial base. This fact makes the photographer an ideal choice to document the area bordering Lake Michigan. Cialdella's pic-