

A Photographic Vision of "Deep Superficiality"

by John O'Donnell



It is axiomatic that any fine-art photography featuring teddy bears as the narrative device may be initially perceived as targeted towards children rather than adults, and verging on “decorative arts” as opposed to “fine art.” Our society’s predilection for associating teddy bears and other stuffed animals with children is a well-established – albeit potentially myopic – cultural trait.

Upon examination of his unfolding body of photographic work, however, the art of John Charles brings this reflexive impulse into question and calls for a deeper investigation of what exactly we are seeing, and why.

It appears that a postmodernist interpretation may offer an appropriate context for this investigation, following Bochner’s 1971 ICA lecture citing Jasper John’s treatment of art “as a critical investigation” rather than an art based on “sense-data and the singular point of view.”¹ We may further identify Anderson’s construct of “postmodern-ironist” as the typological world view in which Charles’ work primarily exists, wherein truth is “socially constructed.”²

Let us assume, for the moment therefore, that we are a postmodernist interpreter (in Schleiermacher’s sense³), and our job is to understand the “text” (the photographs, in this case) via knowledge of its “historical context ... and psychology of the author [i.e., “photographer”].” This leads us into a hermeneutic circle ala Heidegger:

“... thus we are compelled to follow the circle...To enter upon the path is the strength of thought, to continue on it is the feast of thought, assuming thinking is a craft. Not only is the main step from work to art a circle like the step from art to work, but every separate step that we attempt circles this circle. In order to discover the nature of the art that really prevails in the work, let us go to the actual work and ask the work what and how it is.”⁴

To make our analytical logic clearer, let’s apply it to one of

Charles’ earliest works, “*Kuma and Goofy Visit the Queen*,” considered among his strongest political statements and in many ways a keystone for interpretation of the Charles oeuvre.



Kuma and Goofy Visit the Queen

On the surface level, we see two small teddy bears speaking to a human we instantly recognize as a traditional British palace guard, in front of what appears to be a palace of the Queen of England, per the initials “E-R” – Elizabeth Regina – under the

crown insignia. Kuma is the character standing on the left, wearing the clothing of a professional: a necktie and business suit vest. Goofy is the character sitting on the right, bereft of clothing and other class signifiers.

Most admirers of this photo chuckle at Charles' (unwritten) caption for this photo, usually delivered in his public appearances as "Do you have an appointment with the Queen?" asked the guard." The fact that the palace guard is actually bending to address the bears is a further source of amusement, given the strict protocols governing the performance of their duties, under which the guards are refrained from conversation and interaction with human observers, let alone stuffed animals.

At this point, the average viewer of this photograph will smile, and move to another photo in the exhibit or turn to another page in the book, without giving much thought to the semiotics of the scene, carefully constructed by Charles as both a statement of his radical political perspective and a challenge to authority.

Armed with an understanding that there is indeed a deeper reality to Charles' vision, this is where we not only sense a "postmodernist irony" to the photograph, but we begin to identify the signifiers of his political theory, and the multiple layers of his political analysis of, and challenge to, the social status quo.

In no particular order, let us point out some discrete "parts" of his statement, and then aggregate them into his overall thesis. Initially, we notice the colossal size discrepancy between the palace building and the guard, as indicated by the column to the right of the guard, extending well over his height and continuing to an even higher second story outside the frame. Furthermore, the guard box into which the guardsman enters as part of his duties clarifies that his identity is subsumed into the larger entity – he is a part of "the Larger Other," and not an individual free to act on his own volition, for he must "enter the box" to fulfill his role, thereby losing his individuality by becoming nothing more than a "component" of the Larger Other. This Larger Other is

the social construct of a "monarchy" (for we realize via the crown and E-R indicia that we are witnessing a system of inherited aristocracy) putting a further spin on the issue, for it defines the guard primarily as a "subject" of this Larger Other, as befits a discrete "component" within the complex system to which the component contributes its efforts.

We next discern the subsequent and even greater relative size discrepancy between the guard and the teddy bear characters. As small as the guard is as a component of the Larger Other, the bears are even smaller in relation to the guard, forcing us to inquire re their relative status and power. We notice that Charles has given these two bears individual names. He is not showing us "two teddy bears talking to a palace guard." He is showing us "Kuma and Goofy" – two individuals – talking to an unidentified, nameless – and therefore anonymous – representative of a governmental force not beholden to a citizenry, but rather in a position of authority over its subjects due to the assumed rights of an inherited – and not elected – political class. He's also carrying a bayoneted rifle, just to make the power relationship even clearer. Please notice how the bayonet obscures his face, an additional comment by Charles on the anonymity of the military and police forces preventing the individual citizenry from accessing the authorities in power.

Let's next examine the posture of the guard, and the lack of perfect verticality of the palace column in relationship to the perfect verticality of the standing Kuma, and the perfectly vertical sitting posture of Goofy. Is Charles telling us that these representations of "the people" are somehow "straight" while both the Larger Other (the monarchy and the governmental construct into which it has mutated) and the military-police force which supports it – while simultaneously disintermediating it from "the people" – are somehow "bent" or "crooked?" To the extent that one knows the political philosophy endorsed by Charles (part of the questioning required of a hermeneutic circle-like approach towards image interpretation), we would certainly be led to think so.

We then ask ourselves, "Why is one bear (Kuma) dressed in

upper-middle class attire, while the other bear (Goofy) is naked? What political theory is put forward by this distinction in attire?" The answer, I believe, can be found in Charles' rejection of a Marxist interpretation of the supposed class struggle of "petite bourgeoisie vs. working class" as nothing more than the millennia-old strategy of the ruling class to "Divide and Conquer" the population in order to dominate it. Kuma is herein positioned as a well off, white collar worker, standing proudly within a self-perceived professional (yet still petit bourgeoisie) identity, while Goofy (as further indicated by his smaller size and lower position, in addition to his lack of clothing) can be seen as a symbol of the working class, perhaps even the downtrodden masses, bereft of any belongings at all. Rather than opposing each other, the two bears are facing in the same direction, as true "comrades" in their unified and aligned opposition to the military and police powers which subjugate them on behalf of the dominating – and untouchable – Larger Other.

As we contemplate the attire of the participants, it is at this point that we might take note of the guard's hat, and remember that such hats are called "bearskin hats" for a reason: each hat requires the skin of an individual brown or black bear.⁵ An additional level of interpretation now confronts us, as we realize that the military protector of the Larger Other is actually clothed in the skins of his interlocutors, members of the public at large! The inevitable metaphor is that any military which oppresses the people is actually "supplied and clothed" by their own bodies (both living and dead) – a critical commentary on the willingness of the people to become their own oppressors, bringing to mind the attribution to Jay Gould of "I can hire one half of the working class to kill the other half."⁶

Finally, we turn our gaze to what I perceive to be the final key element in Charles' political statement here: the arc of history. Note that the formal composition of this photograph (excluding the three protagonists) consists almost entirely of a grid pattern of vertical and horizontal straight lines, with only four exceptions. A curve in the upper left corner leads the eye from the vertical column on the left (another element symbolic of the Larger Other) directly towards the crown insignia and E-R indicia. A second curve is the black "wave" pressing up against

the tall vertical column on the right (also referring to the Larger Other). The third curve is the pavement curbing, above which the two bears are standing at precisely the spot where an almost logarithmic acceleration of the degree of curve commences. We are immediately reminded of Dr. Martin Luther King's quote, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice."⁷ The reference can only be interpreted as a justice in which the iniquities of slavery and bondage are repudiated and replaced with equality for all. Towards what is this justice aiming? We look at the final non-grid element: the straight-line angles of the guard box directly under the crown insignia, pointing upwards at the "monarchy" as its target, while forming an upside-down "V" – for Victory?

Taken in its totality, this "cute" and "amusing" photograph of two teddy bears and a palace guard when seen only on a surface level is now transformed into a stunning indictment of any governmental administration placing itself above and beyond the "will of the people," while foreshadowing such government's coming destruction via the "arc of the moral universe," however long that justice may take. It is direct in its challenge to the presumed authority of the current powers-that-be, but optimistic in its assertion that "Justice will be done" before this story is over.

Now let us look at another well-known John Charles photo, "*Cowboys Ruggles and Little Rug in Monument Valley*," and once again, "*let us go to the actual work and ask the work what and how it is.*"



Cowboys Ruggles and Little Rug in Monument Valley

As with many of Charles' photographs, we are looking at an immediately familiar-seeming scene – in this case, Monument Valley. As film critic Keith Phipps has written of Monument Valley, “its five square miles have defined what decades of moviegoers think of when they imagine the American West.”⁸

We see several of the buttes in the arid, desert landscape made famous by John Ford and countless other directors of western films and television shows. The red color of the sand is a result of the iron oxide in siltstone deposits from ancient erosion, which has been exposed to the elements. Over hundreds of millions of years, these lowland river basins were filled with the sediments eroding off the early Rocky Mountains, followed by a geological uplifting which raised the basins into a high plateau one to three miles above today's sea level. Wind and water erosion over the last 50 million years cut into and peeled away the plateau, leaving the majestic and towering buttes we see behind the bears.

What many people do not know is that Monument Valley is more correctly termed the “Navajo Nation's Monument Valley Park,” because it is located within the tribal lands of the Navajo Nation.

Under American law, the Navajo Nation is a “Sovereign Indian Nation” (yet still under the plenary power of the US federal government), with its own administration, courts and justice system.

With this background information in hand, we can begin to deconstruct Charles' photograph, identify his political message and determine the “subversion” of yet another “superficially” innocent image.

We see two individually named teddy bears, wearing cowboy hats. Ruggles is on the right, wearing the white hat. Little Rug is on the left, in the black hat. (Keep this positioning in mind, please.) We know the names of each of Charles' recurring photographic subjects from the titles of his images, as well as the ongoing commentaries and individual back-stories included in Charles' oral presentations, online blogs and other activities.⁹ Ruggles is portrayed as an older and more mature bear, usually acting as a mentor to the younger Little Rug. There seems to be a family connection, although the relationship is deliberately unclear in terms of its specifics.

The bears are sitting in the only vibrant patch of green shrubbery in view, which is surrounded by red desert sand. There is a small – but scarce - amount of vegetation outside the border of the bears' patch. Behind the bears rise several of the iconic buttes of Monument Valley.

If we examine the print closely, we also notice an almost invisible fence separating the bears (and their green oasis) from the rest of the (much less luxurious) surroundings. Four vertical posts of a barbed wire fence are located on the right side of the photo (without visible barbed wire), while the actual barbed wire appears on the left side of the photo (without visible supporting posts).

We begin with an obvious question: Why are two teddy bears in the Navajo Nation dressed as cowboys, and not Indians?¹⁰ Why

did they choose the role of “Cowboy” in the ever-popular American game of “Cowboys and Indians,” and not the “Indian” role?

We propose that this is Charles’ comment on the successful cultural public relations activities (or “propaganda,” if you wish) aimed at both “Native” as well as all other Americans as conducted by (overwhelmingly) white government administrators ever since the days of the Long Walk.¹¹ These teddy bears, which would seem to have no particular allegiance to either of the two groups, have chosen to be “Cowboys” instead of the alternative “Indians.” Their location inside the Navajo Nation makes this choice even more ironic. Have they chosen to be the “winners” in this cultural interchange, joining the ranks of the “conquerors” rather than the “vanguished?” Why? And what does this say about the self-image of today’s Native Americans, and their positioning in the Greater American Cultural Hierarchy?

Let’s examine this potential interpretation further. The bears are sitting within a “green oasis” of vegetation amongst the arid landscape – are they “in the money” as “Cowboys” as opposed to being “out of the money” were they to chose being “Indians?” Does the lush greenery represent the success of the winning team in this cultural opposition, while the dry red sand areas represent the “bleeding dry” of its original inhabitants and the “rusting away” of the indigenous culture? Just as the iconic buttes of Monument Valley result from the erosion of the plateau, does this tableau not represent the erosion of the Native American culture by the inroads of the invading (and predominantly) Caucasian culture?

And what is the meaning of that barbed wire fence? Is Charles saying that “fences” need not be physically assembled in order for separation to be accomplished on a psychological level? Is he telling us that there is a “segregation” in place, where the dry and eroded lands – and the “Indian reservations” they represent - are “fenced in” and “apart” from the more vibrant and growing cultures – the “Cowboy”(or “Caucasian?”) spaces – which are “outside the fence” and free? Is the depicted fence – because

barbed wire was the means by which the open frontier was fenced in to keep animals from straying – a metaphor for the treatment of the indigenous culture as less-than-human? We must wonder.

If we consider the two cowboy hats worn by the bears, we may discern further levels of message. First of course, is the “good guy versus the bad guy” dichotomy of “white hat versus black hat.” But what is the meaning in this context? Is Charles merely pointing out the duality of good and evil in all aspects of life, thereby tempering his criticism of the eradication of the native culture with a sort of “It can’t be helped” or “It’s in the nature of things” approach? Possibly, although with any Charles image one is conditioned to think, “But wait, there’s more!”¹²

Given Charles’ oft-stated preference for movies over other forms of performing arts (opera, ballet, concerts, live theater and the like) we have a clue that there may also be a feature film reference or two hidden herein, and we may be right. Let’s consider what might fit the algorithm of “older and younger, seemingly related, one good and one bad, one on the left and one on the right” in the Monument Valley area. My guess is that we are meant to reflect upon a father-son relationship, given the names “Ruggles” and “Little Rug,” which indicate some sort of male, familial and elder-younger relationship. It would appear we are also to consider a traditionally conservative and “right wing” approach (white hat) versus an alternative or revolutionary and “left wing” approach (black hat). One possible answer to this riddle would be the roles Henry and Peter Fonda play in “My Darling Clementine” and “Easy Rider,” respectively.¹³

Henry Fonda plays Wyatt Earp, while Peter’s character is known only as “Wyatt.” Henry is a man of the law, who must implement violence in order for “Civilization” to develop and prosper in a lawless and chaotic land. His climactic scene is the legendary gunfight at the OK Corral, in which the Earps wipe out the Clanton clan. Peter – playing a biker drug dealer, and therefore a rebel to normative culture – returns to Monument Valley in “Easy Rider” in a futile search for meaning and self-awareness, perhaps closing the loop opened when his father’s Earp left town after the

duel at the OK Corral, knowing that his time had passed once the killing ended.

The image becomes replete with meaning and metaphor if this reference may be considered another layer in Charles' multiple dimensions of message in this photograph, and all indications are that we are correct in following this line of thought. The elder lawkeeper (Henry/Wyatt Earp) wears the white hat; the younger rebel (Peter/Wyatt) wears the black hat. The references to the eradication of clans (both the Clantons and the Navajo) are "excused" as the necessary process by which civilization and order must replace barbarism and chaos (as seen from the point of view of the conquerors). The catch is that the conquerors must leave the site of their massacres because they are unfit to live within the civilized peace which ensues,¹⁴ and the sins of the father fall upon the next generation, who are driven – unsuccessfully – to seek their own meaning and purpose within the void created in the aftermath of their forbearers' destruction.

The horrors inflicted upon the indigenous Native Americans have left an "empty zone," in which nothing grows, and yet we as Americans subconsciously experience the location of this sin of our nation every time we revert to this scenery as our core image of the "American West." It is as though Charles is telling us, "Great sins have been visited upon this land and its people, but they were considered to be a necessary part of historical evolution at the time. Now we are left empty and mournful as we consider the implications to us as a more evolved and conscious society. White and black, good and evil, order and chaos, civilization and barbarity – all are part of a Unified Whole in which we must find our way."

The ultimate irony in this image is its implication that the bringers of death wore the white hats, and today's searchers for meaning wear black, because those who question the virtue of our history are rebels.

Let's examine two more photographs featuring the bears Ruggles and Little Rug as examples of additional messages embedded in

Charles' imagery and its surrounding literature.

The first example is "*Ruggles and Little Rug at Mount Rushmore*," which has become another iconic image for Charles. It shows the two bears we met previously in Monument Valley posing as typical tourists in front of Mount Rushmore, with a heavily polarized blue sky almost matching the deep blue of their identical Ralph Lauren "Polo" brand shirts.



Ruggles and Little Rug at Mount Rushmore

Charles' caption for this image begins with:

Ruggles thought it would be a good idea to introduce Little Rug to more American history, especially as it relates to bears. Ruggles pointed out that Teddy Roosevelt, the third man from the left, is a hero to bears because he was the inspiration for "Teddy Bears" back in 1902.¹⁵

In his extensive caption, Charles relates the often-told (and perhaps apocryphal) story of how Teddy Roosevelt refused to shoot a bear cub in an unsportsmanlike manner, which incident

was then featured in an editorial cartoon.¹⁶ An enterprising toymaker in Brooklyn saw the cartoon, created a stuffed bear, asked for and received permission from Roosevelt to use his name for the bear,¹⁷ and the rest was history.¹⁸

In speaking to this image in his public appearances, Charles invariably notes his astonishment at the fact that Teddy Roosevelt personally responded to the toymaker's request to use his name, and asks if such a thing would be possible in today's business and political environments. Based on this talking point, it seems fair to theorize that this anecdote may indicate a sort of nostalgia on Charles' part for a simpler, earlier time in which business and the government (supposedly) worked well together, in contrast to today's (supposed) encroachment by government into areas previously the domain solely of business.

The closing lines of his caption offer an interesting twist which may provide a somewhat deeper understanding of his message, though:

Little Rug wondered why they were named after someone who hunted bears for sport, but he didn't mention this to Ruggles because he was afraid it would result in another long explanation, and he was too hot and tired to listen to it.¹⁹

It is here that we sense some of Charles' typical irony. Little Rug is confused that "someone who hunted bears for sport" should be considered a hero by bears, per Ruggles' explanation. Is Charles telling us that the American government, which is extolled to Americans – especially at such patriotic memorials as Mount Rushmore – as the reason we are "the greatest country on earth" is actually "hunting and killing" its citizens on the one hand (via surveillance and taxation), while pretending to support them with its other hand (welfare and social programs)?

Furthermore, is he telling us that the American people are too "tired to listen" to what is going on with the country, and they would rather "grin and bear it" than make the hard effort to change the direction in which we are heading? It is interesting to

note that the other three heads on Mount Rushmore – Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln – are silent bystanders in this image and are not mentioned in the caption. Is Charles telling us by this omission that their dreams and aspirations for our country have been silenced? This is a perplexing image, with a number of possible interpretations, many of which infer the liberal political philosophy (in the Jeffersonian sense) we frequently encounter with Charles.

To take what I perceive to be Charles' Jeffersonian ideals further (in contrast to Jefferson's contemporary Hamilton, who preferred an elitist, rather than "common man" approach to government) let's examine his "*Ruggles and Little Rug at Baker Beach, San Francisco.*"



Ruggles and Little Rug at Baker Beach, San Francisco

We see the two bears in their usual attire sitting closely together on a sinuous and well-weathered tree trunk lying on the sands of a deserted beach, with a familiar-looking (again) bridge behind them in the distance. Given this perspective, the much larger bridge (for we quickly recognize it as the Golden Gate Bridge and therefore know its general size) is overshadowed by a flourishing tree closer to the bears. Ruggles appears to be leaning forward a bit, almost as though he is trying to get into the photo and avoid

being blocked by Little Rug. Another group of fallen tree trunks and some shorter shrubs in the background are the final compositional elements.

How are we to read this image, given what we know of Charles and his image-making predilections? Charles himself is rarely helpful in offering interpretations, preferring to leave this to the viewer. His caption seems simple enough:

Ruggles and Little Rug came to Baker Beach to take a nice souvenir snapshot of the Golden Gate Bridge, and were happy to realize they had the beach to themselves as they enjoyed the last moments of the late afternoon sun.²⁰

Since nothing is simple about Charles's images, no matter what he says, let's see what we can find in this photograph which synchronizes with his worldview and political philosophy. One significant hint is the phrase, "they enjoyed the last moments of the late afternoon sun." We sense that something is coming to an end here, and although the bears will be able to enjoy it, late-comers will not.

To figure out what that might be, we can review the circumstances surrounding this photo, which we obtain from Charles' online social media posts.²¹ It seems that Ruggles had been escorting Little Rug to a variety of locations in California both to educate Little Rug about the American Dream, and to help him raise funds from venture capitalists in Silicon Valley. The bears had visited (and posed in front of) the garages from which Hewlett Packard and Apple emerged, chrysalis-like, during their metamorphosis from small business start-ups to international corporate giants. They had also been successful in pitching a start-up business plan (for "bearbnb.com," an online temporary lodging service) and raising funds to launch it.

Armed with this contextual awareness, we see this image in a very different light. Ruggles is not trying to "get into the photo." He is actually supporting Little Rug in his business endeavor,

giving him the "backbone" of training and confidence Little Rug will need to accomplish his goal.

We can infer that the words "came to Baker Beach" are a metaphor for "came to Silicon Valley." "To take a nice souvenir snapshot" implies "to take something back with you" –in this case, given the context of the separate back-story, we may assume that "something" (i.e., "a nice souvenir snapshot") relates to "capital."

The Golden Gate Bridge and the trees are the elements we need to understand next. The bears are sitting on a fallen tree trunk – perhaps an image of an industry about to be disrupted by the technology funded by the venture capitalists of Silicon Valley? There are other dead trees lying about – are they carcasses of fallen corporations in a capitalist jungle following the Law of Nature, "Grow or die?" Growing up above these carcasses are several short shrubs, and one large tree. The underside of this tree is dark, but the uppermost leaves shine in the sunlight. We see this matches the composition of the sky – cloudy at low altitudes, and incredibly sunny higher up. The Golden Gate Bridge is bathed in beams of light.

We can now piece together the kind of allegorical story beloved by Charles: The bears have come to a location which thrives on building the new while all around the old die off. Small companies (the shrubs) are easy to build, but only one towering giant tree can be built in any business sector. It is difficult and dark on the underside (the startup phase), but once a suitable height is reached, the organism breaks through into light and conquers its space. The low-hanging clouds are obstacles to break through – competitors, naysayers, bureaucratic regulators perhaps – all of the short-term problems and issues which must be solved by the entrepreneur to allow his emergence into the higher atmosphere filled with sunlight and the promise of even sunnier days to come.

The bridge is the metaphor for "exit" – to leave the city and "escape," perhaps to Napa Valley and beyond, where many

successful people relocate to enjoy their just rewards after years of toil and effort. “Exit strategy” implies the successful handoff of the assets built by this process.

We now realize Charles is talking about achieving one version of the American Dream. Find an idea, build a company, take it public or sell it to another company, and enjoy the rewards of a successful career spent building real value in an honest manner. The bears are in the center of the action in this photo, with the sky the limit.

But two lingering concepts remain in our interpretation, and they temper our enthusiasm with doses of hard cold reality: The bears are alone on this beach, no matter how many others have come and gone earlier in the day. They are the only ones left at the end of the day. They have only themselves to achieve their goals, because no matter how many employees they hire, Charles is telling us, “It’s lonely at the top.” Leaders are the only ones still in the office after the rest of the staff has gone home for the day. We see that Ruggles “has Little Rug’s back,” and we thus infer the importance of loyalty and teamwork for success. No one can truly do it by themselves - they need at least one partner to get through the long haul ahead. (Even an iconoclastic leader like Steve Jobs had Johnny Ive, for example.)

But Charles’ final message may be even chillier. Charles told us that “the last moments of the setting sun” are upon us. Is he saying that we are the final generation to enjoy the freedom of the American Dream? Are we the last, precious few to be able to take independent action in a free world and build successful organizations from the ground up? Are we headed towards the inevitable darkness of a closing economic era which has enriched ourselves and our world?

Once again, Charles has subverted the superficiality of the image, and left us questioning. That is exactly what great art is expected to do.

- 1 - Bochner, Mel. *Solar system & rest rooms: writings and interviews, 1965-2007*, MIT Press, 2008, p. 91
- 2 - Walter Truett Anderson (1996). *The Fontana Postmodernism Reader*.
- 3 - Ramberg, Bjørn and Kristin Gjesdal, "Hermeneutics", Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2003, 2005.
- 4 - Heidegger, Martin. "The Origin of the Work of Art." *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. NY: Harper Collins, 1971.
- 5 - "Britain Will Never Part with Bearskin Hats," Associated Press, 9 January 2008.
- 6 - Frequently attributed, often in the context of strikebreaking activities during the Great Southwest Railroad Strike of 1886. See for example Philip Sheldon Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume 2 - Page 50* (1975)
- 7 - Most commonly associated with Dr. King’s 1964 Baccalaureate sermon at the commencement exercises for Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, Dr. King earlier wrote this quote in a 1958 article printed in “The Gospel Messenger” periodical. It traces back to an earlier 1857 version by Unitarian minister and Transcendentalist Theodore Parker in reference to the sins of slavery (1853, *Ten Sermons of Religion by Theodore Parker, Of Justice and the Conscience*, Start Page 66, Quote Page 84-85, Crosby, Nichols and Company, Boston.)
- 8 - Phipps, Keith. "The Easy Rider Road Trip," *slate.com*, Nov. 17, 2009
- 9 - Usually released as limited-edition works of art in their own right.
- 10 - I will sometimes use the culturally-questionable term “Indian” in this essay instead of the more socially acceptable “Native American” identifier out of deference to Charles’ well-quoted outburst, “I was born in Cleveland, Ohio. That makes me as “Native” an “American” as anyone.”
- 11 - Between August 1864 and the end of 1866, the US government conducted around 53 forced deportations of the Navajo people from their ancestral lands at gunpoint, relocating them 300 miles from their homes in (current day) Arizona to New Mexico, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of the marchers enroute.
- 12 - With a shout-out to Ronald M. "Ron" Popeil and Ronco for their TV commercials immortalizing this phrase.
- 13 - I am indebted to Phipps for identifying “My Darling Clementine” – whose story involves Wyatt Earp’s gunfight in Tombstone, AZ – as a movie shot (if we may use that term in such a context!) in the Monument Valley area.
- 14 - See Burgraff, Ben. “John Ford’s Most Poetic View of the West...” Internet Movie Data Base, August 17, 2003. (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0038762/reviews?ref_=tt_ov_rt)
- 15 - Charles, John. “The OTBP Data Base,” Image number OTBP000.
- 16 - Berryman, Clifford. “Drawing the Line,” *The Washington Post*, November 16, 1902.
- 17 - According to the New York Historical Society, “In 1952, the Brooklyn Eagle reported that the Michtom family still had Roosevelt’s letter granting Michtom permission to use his name in their possession (according to the article, Roosevelt said “I don’t think my name is likely to be worth much in the bear business, but you’re welcome to use it”).” (<http://blog.nyhistory.org/who-really-created-the-teddy-roosevelt-bear/>)
- 18 - With the success of his stuffed “Teddy’s Bear,” Morris Michtom founded the Ideal Novelty and Toy Company.
- 19 - Charles, John. *Ibid.*
- 20 - Charles, John. *Ibid.*
- 21 - In this case, his Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/John.Charles.1000Bears>). Charles has frequently commented in his public appearances that his fine art images are the “tip of the pyramid” of a series of photographs which begin as diaristic snapshots to build back-stories and develop “personalities” for the various bears in their travels around the world. Charles’ social media posts are always a good place to start any image analysis, to locate both the contextual “cover story” of a particular image, and the clues required to pierce through the cover story into the deeper meaning of that image. From these posts are selected stand-alone images for release as his large-scale fine art prints, issued in editions of five or less. Charles has commented, “It takes hundreds of ‘daily diary’ images to build up sufficient contextual meaning to justify releasing a single image as a fine art print.”