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### **North American Portraits: A Quintessential Road Trip**

*The traditional idea of community structure was founded on the idea of individuals forming living groups, derived from families, built through apprenticeships, seeking education, and either a return to, or remaining in or around the area where one was raised (generally within a 20 mile radius). In contemporary modernized society this idea has become a way of the past as individuals no longer feel the need to remain within a distanced range of their place of birth as immigration, social change, and a variety of other reasons bring more and more people to North America each year.*

The paved interlacing of concrete veins and asphalt arteries known as the interstate system, is what somehow acts as the circulatory system for our nation and beyond. It ties commerce and transportation into one, it allows for the exchange of ideas and location, building of relationships, and exposure to new areas in ways not before thought possible. Through examining locations connected by the roadway, this work is meant to explore the aspect of interconnectivity and how this forms a larger identity, as seen through a structure that connects individuals across the continent. There may be a question as to why individuals now reside and / or travel from place to place, as seen through the lens of individual experience and connection. Though ultimately we are all provided the same potential for relocation, exploration, and traversing large distances via this structure of roadways through the use of our own vehicle, public transportation, or otherwise. This potential is something that is realized by many, romanticized historically, and necessary for others. It is also a structure created by the government for the elimination of unsafe roads, inefficient routes, traffic jams and all of the other things that got in the way of “speedy, safe transcontinental travel”. Essentially a method of connection created to allow people access, and it is now this access that is so often questioned when taken advantage of by people from outside an existing community.

As immigration, travel, gentrification, relocation, etc., are so much more common, it is partially this same structure of transportation that aids individuals in their ability to have access to new locations. The search for one thing often reveals its opposite and in this venture the search for national identity and connection also reveals examples of individuals who feel as if this country and the promise of the “American Dream” failed them. The same system that interconnects locations creates a divide amongst its people as expressed through ideas and conversations about gentrification, nationalism, and xenophobia. Both parties in duality are expressed here through the presence, or lack thereof the portrait, at the request of that subject based on their comfort level with being photographed and portrayed for general consumption.

By addressing issues of self and place as navigated through location and context, I seek to explore how viewpoints of one’s own identity, safety, security, and community may vary and alter over geographic, demographic, and cultural differences throughout North America. As I continue utilizing the classic “road trip” as an “all -American” experience, a universally accessible structure and a systematic approach, this serves as a way to connect the individuals interviewed and photographed, while also allowing the viewer an understandable way in which to “navigate” geography, culture, and their own place in this larger national and cultural identity.