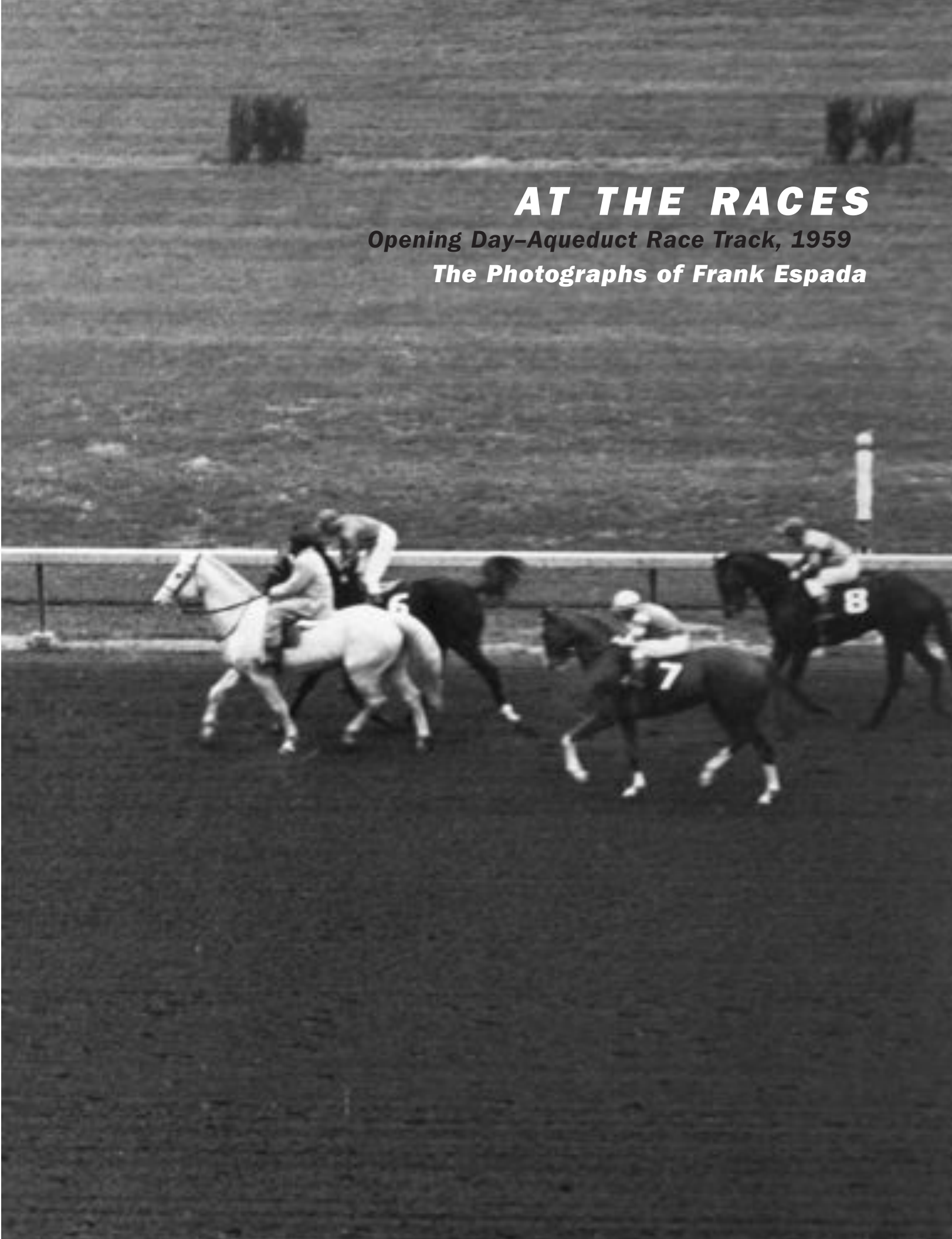


AT THE RACES

Opening Day–Aqueduct Race Track, 1959

The Photographs of Frank Espada

AT THE RACES

Opening Day–Aqueduct Race Track, 1959

The Photographs of Frank Espada

PAUL M. HERTZMANN, INC.
Post Office Box 40447
San Francisco, California 94140
Tel: 415 626-2677 | Fax: 415 552-4160
Email: pmhi@hertzmann.net

2.

FRANK ESPADA

"A short story of my life until now…
I was born in Utuado, Puerto Rico, in 1930. My family and I migrated to New York City in 1939 for reasons unknown to me, and I have lived here since."
—*The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Themes in the Survival of a People* by Frank Espada.

Frank Espada's first efforts with a camera came at age 18. After graduating from high school in 1948, joining the Air Force in 1949, and studying briefly at City College of New York (one of only seven Puerto Ricans in his freshmen class), he enrolled at the New York Institute of Photography in 1955 for two years. With a small group of photographers organized by Dave Heath he studied with W. Eugene Smith in 1961. Smith's concern for the human condition resonated strongly with Espada's own ethos. Rejecting the idea of becoming a commercial photographer he focused his efforts on documentary photography. In addition to Smith, Espada counts Dave Heath as a formative influence, as well as a friend.

Photography took a back seat for many years to the need to earn a living and support his family. After ten years of employment for an electrical contractor, Espada merged his humanist concerns with his work by moving into a career in 1967 as a political organizer and activist for numerous organizations. He served as Executive Vice President of the New York Urban Coalition and as Deputy Commissioner of the Community Development Agency of New York City. During this period he photographed the civil rights struggle and other related social movements.

Not until 1979 was he able to devote himself full-time to photography. That year he was awarded a three-year grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities to realize his long-held goal—to document the Puerto Rican Diaspora in the United States. Forty exhibitions of these photographs took place over a period of fifteen years, between 1981 and 1996.

In 1985, when he moved to San Francisco with his family, he discovered his gift for teaching photography. He has been on the faculty of several San Francisco Bay Area institutions since then. Through this period, he continued to photograph the people who mattered, both famous and not, in the social upheavals of American life—most recently the patients and community health organizers of the Mid-City Coalition for HIV Prevention in San Francisco.

Of late, much deserved attention has caught up with Frank Espada. His book *The Puerto Rican Diaspora: Themes in the Survival of a People* was published in 2006; it has won several design and printing awards. He was interviewed by Amy Goodman and Juan Gonzales for *Democracy Now*, a program affiliated with over 500 radio stations and many independent television stations and has had feature stories in several national and local magazines and newspapers. This year, 2008, "in recognition of his distinguished record of personal and professional accomplishments and service to society," he will receive a Doctor of Arts degree from Lehman College of the City University of New York.

3.

The photographs in this catalogue chronicle the reopening of the Aqueduct Race Track in New York on September 14, 1959. Working for the electrical contractor on the three-year renovation of the track, Espada was able to gain access to the event with his camera. Since track officials were not eager for the bettors and betting activities to be photographed, he had scored an unusual opportunity.

Like all of his photographs, these images say much about human nature and emotion. Here we have people whose hearts and minds are focused on the irrational hope of beating the odds. With honesty and empathy Espada astutely portrays them absorbed in their dreams. Espada describes the scene:

> "Minutes before the race was to begin, they would quickly line up to make their bets; some didn't get there on time. Then there was a bit of a rush to get to a spot where one could see the race. But a surprising number of them didn't even bother to do this; they simply watched the TV or listened to the race announcer, then went back to their calculations for the next race....
> I believe that no one ever saw me taking their photo (or any photo)...They were so busy 'figuring' that they obviously didn't see me, for what could I have been doing, taking pictures while their ponies were running around the track?"

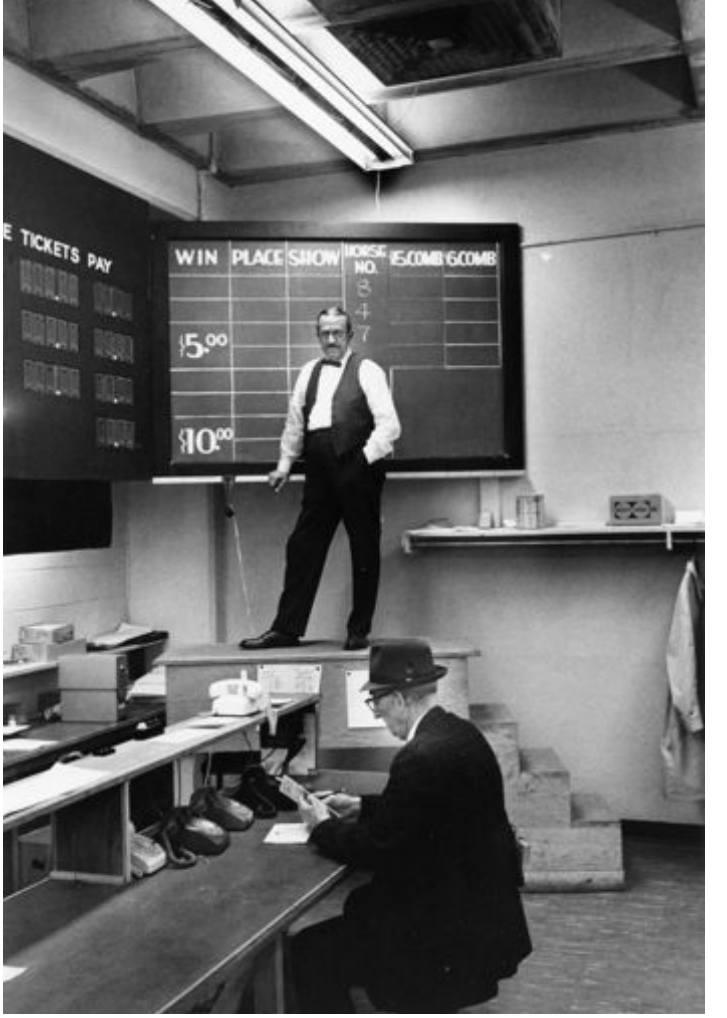
9.

10.

11.

12.

13.


TICKETS PAY
WIN
PLACE
SHOW
HORSE NO.
5 COMB
6 COMB
3
4
7
$5.00
$10.00

14.

3
3

15.

16.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHS

All photographs are signed and dated vintage silver prints from the collection of the photographer; some are flush-mounted, others are unmounted. Regarding the printing of these photographs, Espada takes pains to emphasize the collaborative effort between himself and Dave Heath. Because of the pressure of time, and the fact that Heath had a darkroom and Espada did not, Heath was enlisted to print the negatives. All the prints in this catalogue were made in his darkroom. Simultaneously, working closely on design and layout, Espada and Heath assembled two books of 21 original photographs, entitled *Race Track: A Photographic Impression by Frank Espada*. One copy was presented to track authorities, the other remains with the photographer.

1. Checking the Racing Page, 13½ x 10½ inches [4949]
2. Placing a Bet, 9⅛ x 12 inches [4956]
3. Two Men Watching the Races, 10½ x 13½ inches [4933]
4. Discussing the Odds, 13¼ x 10⅜ inches [4948]
5. Couple at the Track, 10¼ x 13⅜ inches [4935]
6. Figuring the Odds Together, 7½ x 9½ inches [4942]
7. "Sunny Jim" Fitzsimmons, Trainer, 7¼ x 10¾ inches [4940]
8. Waiting for the Race, 10½ x 13½ inches [4934]
9. Watching the Race, 7½ x 9½ inches [4943]
10. Reading the Fine Print, 10½ x 10 inches [4932]
11. To the Starting Gate, 6¾ x 13⅜ inches [4930]
12. Jockeys, 6⅜ x 9 inches [4952]
13. Reading the Racing Sheets, 7⅝ x 11¼ inches [4953]
14. Veteran at the Betting Parlor, 9⅛ x 6¼ inches [4950]
15. Jockey on Horseback, 8 x 10¾ inches [4937]
16. Four Solitary Players, 7½ x 9½ inches [4931]

All photographs are copyrighted and cannot be reproduced without the written consent of the photographer.

© 2008 Paul M. Hertzmann, Inc. & Frank Espada
Designed by Richard D. Moore

PAUL M. HERTZMANN, INC.
Post Office Box 40447
San Francisco, California 94140
Tel: 415 626-2677 | Fax: 415 552-4160
Email: pmhi@hertzmann.net

Cover illustration: To the Starting Gate [4930] (detail)

Paul M. Hertzmann, Inc.
Post Office Box 40447
San Francisco, California 94140
Tel: 415 626-2677 Fax: 415 552-4160
Email: pmhi@hertzmann.net