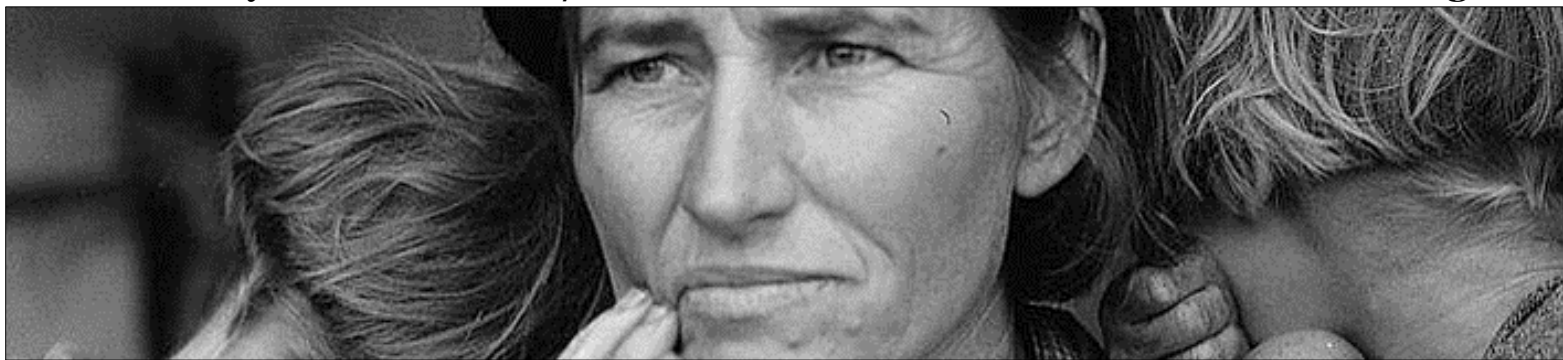


Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives



Background and Scope of the Collection

The photographs of the Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information (FSA-OWI)* Photograph Collection form an extensive pictorial record of American life between 1935 and 1944. This U.S. government photography project was headed for most of its existence by Roy Emerson Stryker, formerly an economics instructor at Columbia University, and employed many talented photographers such as Jack Delano, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Carl Mydans, Gordon Parks, Arthur Rothstein, Ben Shahn, Marion Post Wolcott, John Vachon, among others. The project initially documented cash loans made to individual farmers by the Resettlement Administration and the construction of planned suburban communities. The second stage focused on the lives of sharecroppers in the South and migratory agricultural workers in the Midwest and western states. As the scope of the project expanded, the photographers turned to recording both rural and urban conditions throughout the United States as well as mobilization efforts for World War II.

The collection encompasses the images made by photographers working in Stryker's Historical Section as it existed in a succession of government agencies: the Resettlement Administration (1935-1937), the Farm Security Administration (1937-1942), and the Office of War Information (1942-1944). The collection also includes photographs acquired from other governmental and non-governmental sources, including the News Bureau at the Offices of Emergency Management (OEM), various branches of the military, and industrial corporations. In total, the collection consists of about 175,000 black-and-white film negatives and transparencies, 1,610 color transparencies, and around 107,000 black-and-white photographic prints, most of which were made from the negatives and transparencies. Largely through the efforts of Stryker, the photograph collection was permanently transferred to the Library of Congress in 1944 for archival preservation and public access.



How the Photographs Were Produced

The Historical Section's main office was in Washington, D.C., and the photographers were sent out on assignments by Stryker throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. The office distributed photographic equipment and film, drew up budgets, allocated travel funds, hired staff, developed, printed, and numbered most negatives, reviewed developed film, edited photographers' captions written in the field, and maintained files of negatives, prints, and captions. The main office also distributed images to newspapers, magazines, and book publishers, and supplied photographs to exhibitions.

The Historical Section photographers were given specific subjects and/or geographic areas to cover. These field assignments often lasted several months. Before beginning their assignments, photographers read relevant reports, local newspapers, and books in order to become familiar with their subject. A basic shooting script or outline was often prepared. Photographers were encouraged to record anything that might shed additional light on the topic that they were photographing, and they received training in making personal contacts and interviewing people.

Most of the time the photographers mailed their exposed negatives to the photographic unit's lab in Washington for developing, numbering and printing. In the initial years of the project Stryker was almost exclusively responsible for reviewing contact prints made from the negatives and selecting images that he considered suitable for printing. Over time, however, photographers played a greater role in picture selection. Rejected images were classified as "killed." In earlier phases of the project a hole was sometimes punched through the "killed" negatives — later, this practice was abandoned. The rejected images are usually near duplicates and alternate views of a printed negative. After Stryker reviewed and selected images, the negatives and contact prints (or "first prints") were returned to the photographers for captioning. The resulting captions were edited at the photographic unit's headquarters. The selected images were then printed and mounted, the captions were applied to the photo mounts, and the photographs were filed in the photographic unit's file.

*The Farm Security Administration & The Office of War Information

The FSA was created in the Department of Agriculture in 1937. The FSA and its predecessor, the Resettlement Administration, were New Deal programs designed to assist poor farmers during the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. Roy Stryker headed the Historical Section within the RA and FSA from 1935-1942. During its 8-year existence, the Historical Section photographic project created the 77,000 black-and-white documentary still photographs, for which it is world-famous. Beginning in 1939, it also created 644 color documentary still photographs. The Section's documentary project continued for one year after the unit moved to the OWI in 1942. The OWI served as an important U.S. government propaganda agency during World War II. During 1942 and 1943, the OWI contained two photographic units: 1) a section headed by Roy Stryker, and 2) the News Bureau. The photographers in both units documented America's mobilization during the early years of World War II, concentrating on such topics as aircraft factories and women in the workforce.

Credit Source and Website: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>