



Arthur Rothstein
July 1938

Arthur Rothstein (1915–1985) arrived in the Dust Bowl in April of 1936. He was 21 years old, the son of Jewish immigrants, born and raised in New York City. Fresh from Columbia University, Rothstein had been the first photographer hired by Roy Stryker, his former professor, at the Resettlement Administration, a New Deal agency that, from 1935 to 1936, relocated struggling families to communities planned by the federal government. The photography unit, later part of the Farm Security Administration, documented for the public not only the multitude of problems the nation was facing, but what the government was doing about them.

Rothstein—who learned how to drive a car in order to take the job—had been working for Stryker less than a year when he arrived in Boise City, Oklahoma. Fourteen miles south, at the homestead of Art Coble in rural Cimarron County, he shot the most famous photograph of his career. "I was about to get into my car when I turned to wave to [Coble and his two sons]," Rothstein later remembered. "And I looked and saw this man bending into the wind, with one of the boys in front of him and another one behind him, and great swirls of sand all around, which made the sky and the earth become one. And I said, 'What a picture this is!' and I just picked up my camera and went 'click.' One photograph, one shot, one negative." The image Rothstein captured at the Coble farm was soon widely reprinted across the country, touching emotional chords with everyone who saw it, becoming the iconic picture of the Dust Bowl and one of the most widely reproduced photographs of the 20th century.



During his five years with the FSA, Rothstein shot some of the most significant photographs ever taken of rural and small-town America. He went on to a successful commercial career as the Director of Photography at *Look* and *Parade* magazines. Rothstein died in November of 1985. He is today remembered as one of America's most important and influential photojournalists.

Arthur Rothstein, January 1979
Amarillo Museum of Art