



## **Marion Post Wolcott 1940**

Marion Post Wolcott (1910-1990) was born in New Jersey, and in 1932 traveled to Europe to study dance in Paris, and later, child psychology at the University of Vienna. There she met Trude Fleischmann, a Viennese photographer, who upon seeing Marion's first photographic images encouraged her to continue with her photography. While in Vienna, a horrified young Marion personally witnessed the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Europe. Many of her friends — musicians, artists, and young intellectuals — were also Jewish, and Marion watched as swastikas burned in front of the

homes of her anti-Nazi friends. As events became too dangerous for her to stay, and with the University of Vienna closed, Marion returned to the United States in 1934 prior to the attempt by the Nazi Party in Austria to overthrow the government. Back in the States, Marion became active in the *League Against War and Fascism*, and helped Jews, including Trude Fleischmann, leave Europe and immigrate to the United States.

Fresh from her experiences in Europe, and as the Great Depression in the United States began to impact the working people around her, she witnessed dramatic class differences in the small Massachusetts town where she was teaching. Each day she saw in her classroom the children of wealth and privilege; in the evening, the struggling millworkers and their children, and Wolcott grew increasingly disillusioned with the "American System". In 1935 as a staff photographer for the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, she was required to do stories on the latest fashion and events for the ladies' page, hardly compelling assignments for a young woman of 25 with her background and experiences! After 3 years of unfulfilling assignments, Marion voiced her frustrations to her Editor, Ralph Steiner, who showed her portfolio to Roy Stryker, head of the Farm Security Administration. Marion was immediately hired, and from 1938 through 1942 she produced more than 9,000 photographs for the FSA, mostly in the South, reflecting her many years of social and political involvement, her strength and independence, and her deep sensitivity to the children and families of the less fortunate.



Her work for the FSA is known for her contrasting images of the wealthy and the poor, of migrant farmers in their shacks and affluent spectators at the horse races, of the destitute standing in line waiting to be paid, and of the more fortunate being served at a private beach club. Wolcott's photographs also suggest the political — segregation and discrimination; eroded and worn-out land; dirty, sick, malnourished children; overcrowded schools. She traveled primarily alone, up

to a month at a time, got tired and lonely and sick and burned out. She had to wrap her camera in hot water bottles to keep the shutters from freezing; write captions at night in flimsy motel rooms while fending off the men trying to enter through the transoms; deal with southern social workers, suspicious cops, chiggers and mosquitoes; mud, heat, and humidity.

Wolcott's said of her work, "...as an FSA documentary photographer, I was committed to changing the attitudes of people by familiarizing America with the plight of the underprivileged, especially in rural America...".



**Marion Post Wolcott, 1985**