

Stryker's America

A documentary film about Depression Era Photography

Roy Emerson Stryker was recruited by the U.S. Government to make a record of the successes of a Depression Era federal agency. As the Depression worsened dramatic and hard-hitting evidence was needed to convince legislators and the public that help was needed. Photography was the means to prove what exactly was going on. Not a photographer himself, Stryker enlisted an energetic and passionate group of photographers who traveled across America documenting the economic tragedy.



Stryker's America provides an insight on how this photo documentation project evolved and how Roy Stryker single handedly conceived and nurtured the mission. The images from this collection include, Dorothea Lange "Migrant Mother" Arthur Rothstein's "Dust Bowl" and Gordon Park's "American Gothic."



In the 1930's, there was no CNN, no Internet, and no nightly news that provided a comprehensive summary of the natural and economic tragedy. However, the still image was becoming an accepted medium that provided actual proof of events and situations, something that the printed word could not accomplish. The ensuing photographs from this select group of photographers showed hardship, anguish, and the misfortunes of many Americans.

With interviews from Beverly Brannan, Photography Curator, Library of Congress, Alan Fern, retired Director of the National Portrait Gallery, and Peter Kuznick, American University History Professor; they discuss the project and Stryker's ability that shaped the project.



The collection of images known as the RA/FSA/OWI collection operated from 1938-1943. (Originally part of Resettlement Administration, it was reorganized into the Farm Security Administration and then into the Office of War Information). These images were used in newspapers, magazines, books and exhibits. The photographs became a defining statement of the era.

As Gordon Parks quoted years after the project ended that photography was a powerful tool, "The camera was a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs."



The collection of nearly 200,000 images showed America's courage. It was a window to show America to Americans. No other project like this existed before or was done afterwards. This project helped to define documentary photography and started the careers of some the 20th Century's most celebrated American photographers.

A Documentary Film by Laurence L. Levin and Justin H. Schauble

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