

Picturing Poverty



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Working for the government's Farm Security Administration in the 1930s, photographers set out across the country to capture the human face of the Depression. Walker Evans' portraits of sharecroppers and Dorothea Lange's images of migrant families today stand as the most popular images from the FSA's project. Yet, in their own time, the pictures functioned as urgent, powerful reminders that one-third of the nation was in a real crisis. Focusing on these and other well-known FSA photographs, Finnegan examines how popular magazines constructed complex and often contradictory messages about poverty. Picturing Poverty also explores a moment in American history when visual images took center stage as the nation struggled with economic, political, and social strife. By striving to understand the original context of the photographs, Finnegan shines new light on the meanings of poverty, the Depression, and the various roles of the media. At once a persuasive analysis of FSA images and a balanced commentary on the role of the media, Picturing Poverty is above all a look into the difficult issue of how the mass media presents social issues to Americans.

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