



Farm Security Administration Photographs of Florida

Michael Carlebach, Jr. Eugene F. Provenzo

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"A first-time presentation of significant and historically important photographs showing what life was like . . . for a substantial number of people living and working in Florida during the 1930s. . . . The photographs alone make a significant contribution to scholarship."--Samuel Proctor, University of Florida

"I want you to take pictures of everything you can find of what's happening to the people," Roy Emerson Stryker told the staff of the photography project of the Farm Security Administration, a New Deal agency. "I think you are going to find it in the faces of the people." From 1935 to 1943 FSA photographers combed the countryside, "making and disseminating images that explained America to Americans while they raised public and congressional support for Franklin D. Roosevelt's more controversial farm programs." The basic concern of the FSA was agriculture, Stryker said. "Dust, migrants, sharecroppers. Our job was to educate the city dweller to the needs of the rural population."

Michael Carlebach and Eugene Provenzo, Jr., examine the work of the FSA in Florida as revealed in ninety-four images made by photographers John Collier, Dorothea Lange, Carl Mydans, Gordon Parks, Marion Post Wolcott, and Arthur Rothstein. The work of Stryker's photography unit was described many years later by Arthur Rothstein: "There was a feeling that you were in on something new and exciting, a missionary sense of dedication to this project, of making the world a better place to live in."

Like the rest of the South, rural Florida was desperately poor during the depression. Per capita income in the state dropped from \$510 in 1929 to \$298 in 1933, and 157 banks permanently closed their doors between 1928 and 1940. Many of the FSA photographs illustrate how poor men, women, and children lived, worked, and survived during hard times. Balancing images of the impoverished are those of ordinary tourists, of the middle-class residents of small towns and villages, and of the well-to-do in cities along the southeastern coast. Together with photographs depicting soil erosion, the misuse of farmlands in northern counties, and the decline of the fishing, wood pulp, and timber industries, the Florida FSA collection offers a brilliant composite portrait of the sunshine state in the grip of the Great Depression.

Michael Carlebach is associate professor in the School of Communication and director of the American Studies program at the University of Miami, as well as a widely published documentary and journalistic photographer. His most recent book is *The Origins of Photojournalism in America*.

Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr. is a professor in the School of Education at the University of Miami and the author of many books, including *Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo*.

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