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Walker Evans 1903-1975

# Walker Evans

Photographer (1903 – 1975)

Evans was a photographer best known for his work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) documenting the effects of the Great Depression. Much of Evans' work from the FSA period used a large-format, 8x10-inch camera. He said that his goal as a photographer was to make pictures that are "literate, authoritative, transcendent."

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Evans graduated from Phillips Academy, then studied French literature for a year at Williams College before dropping out. He took up photography in 1928, and in 1933, on assignment for a book publisher, he went to Cuba to photograph the revolt against the dictator Gerardo Machado.

In 1935, Evans began photographing for the National Resettlement Administration (NRA) in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. He continued to do work for the RA and later the FSA, primarily in the Southern states.

In the summer of 1936, while still working for the FSA, he and writer James Agee were sent by *Fortune* magazine on assignment to Hale County, Alabama, for a story the magazine subsequently opted not to run. In 1941, Evans' photographs and Agee's text detailing the duo's stay with three white tenant families in southern Alabama during the Great Depression were published as the groundbreaking book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Its detailed account of three farming families paints a deeply moving portrait of rural poverty.

In 1938, an exhibit entitled *Walker Evans: American Photographs* was held at The Museum of Modern Art. This was the museum's first exhibit devoted to the work of a single photographer. The catalogue included an essay by Lincoln Kirstein, whom Evans had befriended in his early days in New York.

In the mid-40's, he became an editor at *Fortune* magazine, a stay that lasted through 1965. That year he became a professor of photography on the faculty for graphic design at the Yale University School of Art. Evans died at his home in Old Lyme, Connecticut, in 1975.