

Indiana Farm Security Photographs



Power of Photos

The Information Division of the FSA was responsible for providing educational and press information to the public and government. Many of the images appeared in popular magazines. Stryker sought photographs that "related people to the land and vice versa" because those photographs helped the idea that poverty could be changed by through reform. The official job description was:

“To direct the activities of investigators, photographers, economists, sociologists and statisticians engaged in the accumulation and compilation of reports, statistics, photographic material, vital statistics, agricultural surveys, maps and sketches necessary to make accurate descriptions of the various phases of the Resettlement Administration, particularly with regard to the historical, sociological and economic aspects of the several programs and their accomplishments.”

The method was to send photographers to shoot before and after stories about resettlement projects to show the need for action and the results of FSA programs. There were many aims, including:

- Promote and explain to Congress the benefits of FSA programs
- Emphasize the importance of agriculture to the overall economy
- Explain to the public its programs and what it was trying to accomplish
- Ensure continued funding from Congress
- Contrast with images in newspapers and newsreels
- Create sympathy in the citizenry and elected representatives for sharecroppers, tenant farmers and migrants

An excellent class project would be to have students identify current examples of photos that have influenced public opinion in some fashion. Then the class could engage in a discussion of the use and effectiveness of photographs in the mass media, sharing the photos they have chosen. How have the photos influenced public opinion? How effective are they in conveying a story? Would the story be the same without the photos?