The Bitter Years:
1935–1941
Rural America as seen by the photographers of the Farm Security Administration
Edited by Edward Steichen

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CHECKLIST
THE BITTER YEARS: 1935-1941
Rural America Seen by the Photographers of the
Farm Security Administration
Oct. 18 - Nov. 25, 1962
Selected by Edward Steichen, Director Emeritus

WALL 1

JOHN VACHON

BEN SHAHN

MARION POST WOLCOTT
Coal miner's child taking home kerosene for lamps. company houses, coal tippie in background. Puraglove, Scotts Run, West Virginia. September, 1938.

DOROTHEA LANGE

DOROTHEA LANGE
He has picked cotton all day and stands at the edge of the field and the cotton wagon. Eloy, Arizona, 1940. Enlarge. of MoMA 472.59

DOROTHEA LANGE
Dispossessed Arkansas farmers (wife only). These people are resettling themselves on the dump outside of Bakersfield, California. Undated.

CARL MYDANS
Interior of wood shack built upon Ford truck chassis housing father, mother, and seven children. This view shows the mother and two of her children. Tennessee. They were found on U.S. Route 70, between Camden and Bruceton, Tennessee, near Tennessee River. March, 1936.

JOHN COLLIER, JR.

WALL 2 (Drought and Erosion)

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
An abandoned farm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma. April, 1936.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
Dry and parched earth in the Bad Lands of South Dakota. May, 1936.

MARION POST WOLCOTT

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
Eroded land tenant's farm, Walker County, Alabama. February, 1937.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

JACK DELANO
Mrs. M. W., widow, who with two children runs a rented farm near Woodville, Greene County, Georgia. June, 1941.
DOROTHEA LANGE

ARTHUR ROTSTEIN
Farmer and sons walking in the face of a dust storm, Cimarron County, Oklahoma. April, 1936.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Dust storm. It was conditions of this sort, which forced many farmers to abandon the area. April, 1935. (New Mexico).

BEN SHAHN
Arkansas squatter’s home. October, 1935.

RUSSELL LEE
Child looking out of window of tent home near Sallisau, Oklahoma, Sequoyah County. June, 1939.

MARION POST WOLCOTT
Old Negro, near Camden, Alabama. May, 1939.

BEN SHAHN
Children of destitute Ozark mountaineer, Arkansas. October, 1935.

WALKER EVANS
Negros in the line-up for food at mealtime in the camp for flood refugees, Forrest City, Arkansas. February, 1937.

RUSSELL LEE
Child in May's Avenue Camp, Oklahoma, eating an overripe canteloupe found in market. July, 1939.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Detail of woman's head. Undated.

RUSSELL LEE

JACK DELANO
Flooding a field of cotton. Greene County, Georgia. June, 1941.

JACK DELANO
Mr. W. H. H., a renter on the Wray place, plowing sweet potatoes, Greene County, Georgia. November, 1941.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Young cotton picker, Kern County, Migrant Camp. California, November, 1936.

DOROTHEA LANGE
These cotton hoers work from 6 am to 7 pm for $1. Near Clarksdale, Mississippi. June, 1937. Mississippi Delta plantation. Use of machinery in cotton production is increasing. It is displacing labor and dislodging tenants. Day laborers for seasonal peaks of hoeing and picking are drawn back from the nearest towns in trucks.
WALL 8 (Cotton) cont’d

MARION POST WOLCOTT
Member of Allen Plantation Cooperative Association and her children taking a rest from hoeing cotton. Near Natchitoches, Louisiana. July, 1940.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Hoe culture, Alabama tenant farmer near Anniston. June, 1936.

DOROTHEA LANGE

RUSSELL LEE
Picking cotton, members of Lake Dick Cooperative Association working together. September, 1938.

BEN SHAHN
Cotton pickers, Pulaski County, Arkansas. October, 1935.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Migratory field worker picking cotton in San Joaquin Valley, California. These pickers are being paid 75 cents per 100 pounds picked cotton. Strikers organizing under CIO Union are demanding $1. A good male picker, in good cotton under favorable weather conditions, can pick about 200 pounds in a day’s work. November, 1938.

MARION POST WOLCOTT
Picking cotton on plantation outside Clarksdale, Mississippi, Delta, Mississippi. October, 1939.

MARION POST WOLCOTT

BEN SHAHN
Arkansas cotton pickers, Pulaski County. October, 1935.

DOROTHEA LANGE

WALL 9 (Sharecroppers)

WALKER EVANS
Corner of kitchen in F.B.’s cabin, Alabama. 1936.

WALKER EVANS
Home of B.F., Alabama Sharecropper. 1936.

WALKER EVANS
Corner of kitchen in B.F.’s home, Alabama. 1936.

WALKER EVANS
B.F. and his family at home, Alabama. 1936.

WALKER EVANS

WALKER EVANS
Landowner in Moundville, Alabama. August, 1936.

WALL 10 (Sharecroppers)

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

DOROTHEA LANGE

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
Girl at Gee’s Bend, Alabama. April, 1937.

WALKER EVANS
Negro cabin, Hale County, Alabama. 1936.

WALKER EVANS
Kitchen wall in B.F.’s house, Alabama. 1936.
(THE BITTER YEARS cont'd)

JACK DELANO

Children of a "squatter" family who were preparing to move out of the Spartanburg army camp area. Near Whiteatone, South Carolina region. March, 1941.

JACK DELANO

One of the children of a "squatter" family that had to move out of the Camp Croft area. Near Whiteatone, South Carolina region. March, 1941.

RUSSELL LEE


RUSSELL LEE

Southeast Missouri Farms - Son of sharecropper combing hair in bedroom of shack. May, 1938.

BEN SHAHN


RUSSELL LEE


BEN SHAHN

Southeast Missouri farms. May, 1938.

BEN SHAHN


RUSSELL LEE

Children of agricultural day laborer in doorway of home near Tullahassee, Oklahoma, Wagoner County. June, 1939.

ARThUR ROTHSTEIN

Child of North Carolina Sharecropper. He has two strikes on him already. September, 1935.

WALKER EVANS


WALKER EVANS

Sharecropper's child, Alabama. 1936

BEN SHAHN

S.N., tenant farmer, Boone County, Arkansas. October, 1935.

BEN SHAHN

Family of destitute Ozark, Arkansas. 1935.

WALL 11 (Sharecroppers)

JACK DELANO

Mrs. L. S. preparing the afternoon meal on her farm in Carroll County, Georgia. April, 1941.

WALKER EVANS

Washroom in the dog-run of F.B.'s cabin, Alabama. 1936.

PAUL CARTER

Tubercular mother and child. New York City. April, 1936.

RUSSELL LEE


THEO JUNG


JACK DELANO

Interior of rural house. Greene County, Georgia. June, 1941.

more...
(THE BITTER YEARS cont'd) -5-

WALL 12 (Sharecroppers and Other Rural Subjects)

DOROTHEA LANGE (Detail of) 16960-E

DOROTHEA LANGE
12 year-old-son of a cotton sharecropper near Cleveland, Mississippi. June, 1937.

RUSSELL LEE
FSA client, former sharecropper. Southeast Missouri farms. 1936.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
Inhabitants of Gee’s Bend, Alabama. April, 1937.

RUSSELL LEE
Negro on porch of general store. Louisiana. October, 1936.

JOHN VACHON
Ozark mountain farmer and family, Missouri. May, 1940.

WALKER EVANS

WALKER EVANS
Alabama Cotton Tenant Farmer Wife. 1936.

WALKER EVANS

CARL MYDANS
Baby girl of family living in Natchez Trace Project, near Lexington, Tennessee. 1935 or 1936.

RUSSELL LEE

DOROTHEA LANGE
Grandmother, mother and new-born baby of a sharecropper family near Cleveland, Mississippi. June, 1937.

RUSSELL LEE
Daughter of migrant auto wrecker doing her lessons on bed in tent home. Corpus Christi, Texas.

WALL 13 ("Tractored Out")

DOROTHEA LANGE
Power farming displaces tenants from the land in the western dry cotton area, Texas Panhandle. June, 1938.

DOROTHEA LANGE (Lange) "L"

BEN SHAWN

JOHN VACHON
Field with deserted house. Dewey County, S.D. Undated.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Abandoned tenant house on a mechanized plantation of the Mississippi Delta, June, 1937.

WALL 14 (Eviction)

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
State highway officials moving sharecroppers from roadside to area between levee and Mississippi River. New Madrid County, Missouri. June, 1939.

Newspaper headline: Evicted Sharecroppers Camp Along Highways In Missouri
THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL (cont'd)

Caption in book: Plantations of the Delta are coming under the machine. The sharecropper system is collapsing in its advance, and croppers are being cut from the land. In protest, hundreds of families - white and black victims of its devastation - left their cabins in January 1939 to camp along 150 miles of open road. Highway U.S. 61 in Southeast Missouri.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

State highway officials moving sharecroppers away from the roadside to area between Levee and Mississippi River. New Madrid County, Missouri. June, 1939.

WALKER EVANS


WALL 15 (On the Road - Automobile)

DOROTHEA LANGE

Route 99 near Tracy, California. Missouri family of five, seven months from the drought area. Worked in California sawmill at 40 cents an hour until it closed. Went to cotton fields at end of harvest, made $5 a week "just scrappin' along; we're not tramps; we hold ourselves to be white folks. We was forced out; we couldn't stay there." A common story. Broke, hungry, sick, car trouble, February, 1937.

DOROTHEA LANGE

Car of drought refugees on the edge of carrot field in the Coachella Valley, California. Spring, 1937.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

Tenant farmer moving his household goods to a new farm. Hamilton County, Tennessee. 1937.

BEN SHAHN

Street musicians in Memphis, Tennessee. 1935.

DOROTHEA LANGE

Baby from Mississippi parked in truck at FSA Camp, Merrill, Oregon. October, 1939.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN


BEN SHAHN

Destitute Ozark family, Arkansas. October, 1935.

DOROTHEA LANGE

Family between Dallas and Austin, Texas. The people have left their home and connections in South Texas and hope to reach the Arkansas Delta for work in the cotton fields. Penniless people. No food and 3 gallons of gas in tank. The father is trying to repair a tire. Three children. Father says, "It's tough but life's tough anyway you take it." August, 1936.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

The family of a migratory fruit worker from Tennessee now camped in a field near the packing house at Winterhaven, Florida. January, 1937.

DOROTHEA LANGE

Imperial Valley, California. Old Mexican laborer saying "I have worked hard all my life and all I have now is my broken body." June, 1935.

DOROTHEA LANGE

Family walking on highway, five children. Started from Iobel, Oklahoma. Bound for Krebs (Kreas), Oklahoma. Pittsburgh County, Oklahoma. In 1936 the father farmed on thirds and fourths at Eagleton, McClintock County, Oklahoma. Was taken sick with pneumonia and lost farm. Unable to get work on WPA and refused county relief in county of 15 years residence because of temporary residence in another county after his illness. June, 1939.

more...
DOROTHEA LANGE
Young Oklahoma mother, age 18, penniless, stranded in California.

DOROTHEA LANGE

DOROTHEA LANGE
Flood refugee family near Memphis, Texas. These people, with all their belongings, are bound for the lower Rio Grande Valley, where they hope to pick cotton. They come from Arkansas, May, 1937.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Young family, penniless, hitch-hiking on U.S. Highway 99, California. The father 24 and the mother 17, came from West Salem, North Carolina, early in 1935. Their baby was born in the Imperial Valley, California, where they were working as field laborers. November, 1936.

DOROTHEA LANGE
A hitch-hiking family waiting along the highway in Macon, Georgia. The father repairs sewing machines, lawn mowers, etc. He is leaving Macon, where a license is required for such work ($25) and heading back for Alabama. July, 1937.

DOROTHEA LANGE
On U.S. 99, near Brawely, Imperial County. Homeless mother and youngest child of seven walking the highway from Phoenix, Arizona, where they picked cotton. Bound for San Diego, where the father hopes to get on the relief "Because he once lived there." February, 1939.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Napa Valley, California. More than 25 years a bindle-stiff. Walks from the mines to the lumber camps to the farms. The type that formed the backbone of the IWW in California before the war. December, 1938.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Firebaugh, California. February, 1939. Came from Webber Falls, Oklahoma, with two grown sons in 1939, cotton picker.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Georgia Road Sign. Warning vagrants. September, 1928.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Mother and baby of family on the road. Tulelake, Siskiyou County, California. September, 1939.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Toward Los Angeles, California. March, 1937.

WALL 17 (Field Workers)

DOROTHEA LANGE

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

CARL MYDANS
Day laborer and wife. Migrants. "Dammed if we'll work for what they pay folks hereabouts." Crittendon County, Arkansas. Cotton workers on the road with all they possess in the world. May, 1936.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Transplanting sweet potato plants; feet and hands; clouds. (Lange) "P"

DOROTHEA LANGE
A former tenant farmer from Texas, now working in California as a pea picker. Nipoma, California. March, 1937.

more...

Migrant potato pickers. Tulelake, Siskiyou County, California. September, 1939.


Street of tents. Undated.


A grandmother washing clothes in a migrant camp. Stanislaus County, California. April, 1939.

Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged 32. Father is a native Californian. March, 1936.

18-year-old mother from Oklahoma, now a California migrant. March, 1937.


Drought refugees from Oklahoma camping by the roadside. They hope to work in the cotton fields. There are 7 in family. Blythe, California. August, 1936.

Tubercular wife and daughter of agricultural day laborer. She had lost six of her eight children and the remaining two were pitifully thin. The mother said she had tuberculosis because she had always gone back to the fields to work within two or three days after her children were born. Shack home is on Potear Creek near Spiro, Oklahoma. June, 1939.

Member Southern Tenant Farmer's Union at time of strike of sharecroppers. Memphis, Tennessee. In Union Hall. Undated.

Migratory field worker's home on the edge of a pea field. The family lived here through the winter. Imperial Valley, California. March, 1937.


Brooding child. Undated.
DOROTHEA LANGE
Drought refugees, California. February, 1936. 1823-C
DOROTHEA LANGE
Aged woman from Oklahoma. Kern Migrant Camp, California. (FSA Camp). November, 1936. 16013-C
DOROTHEA LANGE
Woman in pea picker's camp, California. "I seen our corn dry up and blow over the fence back there in Oklahoma." March, 1937. 16302-E
DOROTHEA LANGE
Young migrant mother with 6-week-old baby in a labor contractor's camp, near Westley, California. The baby was born in a hospital with the aid of FSA Medical and Aid Association for Migratory Workers. "I try to keep him eatin' and sleepin' regular like I got him out of the hospital." April, 1939. 19486-E
DOROTHEA LANGE
Brawley, Imperial Valley (California), in FSA Migratory Labor Camp. Family father, mother and 11 children originally from Mangrom (or grum?) Oklahoma. February, 1939. 19208-C
DOROTHEA LANGE
Migrant cotton picker's child who lives in a tent in the Government Camp instead of along the highway or in a ditch bank. Shafter Camp for Migrants, California. November, 1938. 18440-E
DOROTHEA LANGE
Grandmother of 22 children, from a farm in Oklahoma; 80 years old. Now living in camp on the outskirts of Bakersfield, California. "If you lose your pluck you lose the most there is in you -- all you've got to live with." November, 1936. 9857-C

WALL 20 (Old Age)

DOROTHEA LANGE
White Angel Breadline, San Francisco. 1932. (Lange) "P"

DOROTHEA LANGE

MARION POST WOLCOTT
Mrs. L., ninety-one-year-old mother of Miss N.L., and reared in Orange County, North Carolina, and had lived here since her marriage sixty-nine years ago. 1939. 52102-D

RUSSELL LEE
Hand of Iowa tenant farmer's wife (Mrs. O. - See 11121 below) Miller Township, Woodbury County, Iowa. December, 1936. 10582

RUSSELL LEE
Mr. and Mrs. O., homesteaders, Miller Township, Woodbury County, Iowa. December, 1936. 11121 M-3

WALL 21 (Old Age)

RUSSELL LEE
Exhausted flood refugee resting. Sikeston, Missouri. February, 1937. 11149 M-4

JACK DELANO
Aged couple at an auction in East Albany, Vermont, August, 1941. 21033 M-4

JACK DELANO
Mrs. C. L., life-long resident of area being taken over by the Army, who is moving to the town of Adams. Leraysville, New York. August, 1941. 45320-D

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
Study Coll. MOMA F. C. of Corbin Hollow, Virginia. October, 1935. 2187

DOROTHEA LANGE
This man was born a slave in Greene County, Georgia. July, 1937. 17970-C

more...
DOROTHEA LANGE
A. S., born a slave in South Texas, Corpus Christi. August, 1936.

JACK DELANO
Hands of Mr. H.B., ex-slave. Parks Ferry Road, Greene County, Georgia. May, 1941.

JACK DELANO
Old ex-slave on a farm near Greensboro, Alabama. May, 1941.

JACK DELANO
In the home of S.D., Italian FSA client, near Canterbury, Connecticut. His mother sells hooked rugs to supplement their farm income. November, 1949.

RUSSELL LEE
Helping the plates at dinner on the grounds at all day community sing. Pie Town, New Mexico. June, 1940.

PAUL CARTER
Tubercular mother and child, New York City. April, 1936.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN

DOROTHEA LANGE
Home of Rural Rehabilitation client, Tulare County, California. They bought 20 acres of raw, unimproved land with a first payment, which was money saved out of relief budget (August, 1936). They received an FSA loan of $700 for stock and equipment. Now they have a one-room shack, 7 cows, 3 sows and home-made pumping plant, along with 10 acres of improved permanent pasture. Cream check approximately $30 per month. Husband also works about 10 days per month on odd jobs outside the farm. Husband is 26 years old, wife 22, 3 small children. Been in California 5 years. "Piece by piece this place gets put together. One more piece of pipe and our water tank will be finished." November, 1938.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Family living in tent and building the house around them. Near Klamath County, Oregon. August, 1939.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Cabbage cutting and hauling by new Vennesy (flat truck) system now also used in carrots and lettuce. Imperial Valley, California. March, 1937.

DOROTHEA LANGE

DOROTHEA LANGE
Migrant agricultural worker. Near Holtville, California. February, 1937. Waiting for the second pea crop, after the winter crop froze.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Sharecropper boy, Chesnee, South Carolina. June, 1937.

DOROTHEA LANGE
Ex-tenant farmer on relief grant in the Imperial Valley, California. March, 1937.
waiting for the semi-monthly relief checks at Calipatria, Imperial Valley, California. Typical story: 15 years ago they owned farms in Oklahoma. Lost them through foreclosure when cotton prices fell after the War. Became tenants and sharecroppers. With the drought and dust they came west - 1934-37. Never before left the county where they were born; now although in California over a year they haven't been continuously resident in any single county long enough to become a legal resident. Reason: migratory agricultural laborers. March, 1937.

BEN SHAIN

DOROTHEA LANGÉ
Former Texas tenant farmers displaced by power farming. May, 1937.

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
Migrant field worker. Tulare Migrant Camp. Visalia, California. March, 1940.

MARION POST WOLCOTT
Mr. R.B.W, visiting his general store. He is president of the bank and practically owns and runs the town. He is a big land owner, owns W.D, farm and a cotton mill in Clayton. He says he cut down the trees and pulled up the stumps out of the main street and was the first man in that town of Wendall, Wake County, North Carolina. September, 1939.

DOROTHEA LANGÉ
The day after election. Oakland, California. November 12, 1936.

DOROTHEA LANGÉ
Father and Son. Idle American workmen near Budgeton, N. J. No date.

BEN SHAIN
A deputy with a gun on his hip during the September, 1935 strike in Morgantown, West Virginia. September, 1935.

MARION POST WOLCOTT

DOROTHEA LANGÉ

DOROTHEA LANGÉ
Sign during great cotton strike. Kern County, California. 1928.

WALL 25 (Schools)

JOHN VACHON
Morton County, North Dakota. Playing "Cut that Pie" or "Fox and Geese" at noon recess at a rural school. February, 1940.

RUSSELL LEE

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
School at Skyline Farms, Alabama. February, 1937.

RUSSELL LEE

JACK DELANO
White Plains, Greene County, Georgia. The three-teacher Negro school.
(THE BITTER YEARS cont'd)

BEN SHAHN
Interior of Ozark School, Arkansas. September, 1935. 6090 M-5

WALL 26 ( Couples)  

JACK DELANO
Negro preacher and his wife sitting under photos taken of them twenty years ago. They live in an old converted school house with two grandchildren. The rest of their children have moved out of the country. Beard County, Georgia. April, 1941. 43918-D

DOROTHEA LANGE
Migratory labor workers. Brawely, Imperial Valley, California. February, 1938. 19227-C

JACK DELANO
Farmer and his wife who live on one of the hill farms east of Burlington, Vermont. August, 1941. 46165-D

THEO JUNG
Prospective clients whose property has been optioned by the Government. Brown County, Indiana. October, 1935. 4051 M-4

BEN SHAHN
Rehabilitation clients, Boone County, Arkansas. October, 1935. 6034 M-2

JACK DELANO
Mr. and Mrs. O.A. - Armenian vegetable farmers in West Andover, Massachusetts. They have an 11-acre farm and a son works in a blanket factory in Lowell to help support the family. January, 1941. 42816-D

WALL 27 (Heroic Women)

RUSSELL LEE
Indian woman, wife of farmer, McIntosh County, Oklahoma. 12244 M-5

DOROTHEA LANGE
Ex-slave with a long memory. Alabama. 1938. (Lange) "C"

DOROTHEA LANGE
"This is a hard way to serve the Lord." Oklahoma drought refugee, California. March, 1937. 18239-C

RUSSELL LEE
Migrant man and wife camped near Sebastin, Texas. January, 1939. (Wife only). 12022 M-4

WALL 28 (Heroic Women)

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN
M.E., widow living with her daughter on farm. Garrett County, Maryland. December, 1937. 26097-D

DOROTHEA LANGE
Clouds. Undated. Lange "E"

DOROTHEA LANGE
Ma B. An "Arkansas Mosier" born in 1855, Conway, Arkansas. "My father was a Confederate soldier. He gave his age a year older than it was to get into the Army. After the War he bought 280 acres from the railroad men and cleared it. He never had a mortgage on it. In 1920 the land was sold, the money divided. Now none of my children own their land. It's all done gone, but it raised my family. I've done my duty - I feel like I have. I've raised 12 children." June, 1938. 12839

WALL 29 (Heroic Women)

JACK DELANO
Daughter of Mr. B.G., preacher and FSA borrower. Near Union Point, Greene County, Georgia. June, 1941. 44571-D

WALL 30 (Heroic Women)

DOROTHEA LANGE
Young child, long hair. Near Casa Grande, Arizona, 1940. (Lange) "B"

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Planted field. No caption. March, 1940. 7772-ZB

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