



***“DOCUMENTING THE FACE OF AMERICA:  
ROY STRYKER AND THE FSA/OWI PHOTOGRAPHERS”  
TO AIR NATIONALLY ON PBS  
ON MONDAY, AUGUST 18, 2008 AT 10PM***

***Film Chronicles the Work of the Ground-Breaking Photographers Who Captured  
the Face of Depression-era America***

It was the first time Americans saw each other’s faces and witnessed what life was like across the nation: North to South, East to West, rich and poor, black and white. Ordinary people. Extraordinary times.

**DOCUMENTING THE FACE OF AMERICA: Roy Stryker and the FSA/OWI Photographers** brings to life the remarkable stories behind the legendary group of New Deal-sponsored photographers who traversed the country in the 1930s and early 1940s, and created what has become a national treasure.

Narrated by Julian Bond, this new one-hour film airs nationally on PBS August 18<sup>th</sup> at 10PM (check local listings) and explores the personal vision and the struggles experienced by photographers Gordon Parks, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Walker Evans, Marion Post Wolcott, and Jack Delano, who created some of the most iconic images in history. Still recognized today, Dorothea Lange’s haunting photograph of the “Migrant Mother” remains one of the most famous images of all time.

This unlikely group of photographers and artists was brought together by a fiery Prairie populist and government bureaucrat named Roy Stryker. His vision of sending some of America’s most talented photographers out into the countryside in a government-sponsored project drew ire from the conservatives in Congress, and praise from the general public. What they captured, for the first time, was a complete picture of their countrymen in the context of a national identity. As Stryker would later comment, “Our photographers had one thing in common, and that was a deep respect for human beings.”



But the photographs were controversial and the agency under constant attack. At one point the collection was under threat of destruction by the conservative Congressional opponents of the time, who considered the photographs portraying the heartbreak of the Dust Bowl era all the way through the forced re-location of Japanese-Americans at the outset of WWII, as propaganda. Today, this vast collection of over 160,000 photographs, many never before seen by the public, still remains hauntingly relevant to our lives.

*“Roy Stryker proved to me that you cannot photograph a bigot and say ‘this is a bigot’ because they have a way of looking just like everybody else. What the camera had to do was expose the evils of racism, the evils of poverty, the discrimination and the bigotry by showing the people who suffered most under it.”*  
– Gordon Parks (on-camera interview)

From 1935 to 1943, these artists changed not only the course of photography but the way Americans related to the plight of their countrymen. Published in newspapers and magazines from coast to coast, their powerful images helped transform popular opinion in a way that words and speeches never could.

Highlighting the forgotten pieces of our collective history, **Documenting the Face of America** features on-camera interviews with FSA photographers **Gordon Parks, Rondal Partridge** and **Louise Rosskam**; acclaimed historians and scholars including Pulitzer Prize winning author **David Kennedy** and **F. Jack Hurley**; oral histories; archival footage; and detailed excerpts from the diaries and shooting scripts kept by Stryker and the photographers.

*“If you could get all the work that Stryker was responsible for, you would see the face of America in the 1930s and ‘40s that nobody has ever seen together.”*  
– Gordon Parks

Specially produced for public television, **Documenting the Face of America** is not only an opportunity to revisit this important time in our collective history in a deeply personal way, but to also inspire a new generation of documentary photographers to build on the traditions and passions of their predecessors to continue to confront questions of truth with the camera.

Written and directed by Jeanine Isabel Butler and co-produced by Alastair Reilly and Catherine Lynn Butler, with post-production assistance by The Park Group, this program was also made possible by a grant from The Southern Humanities Media Fund.

A production of Butlerfilms LLC in association with South Carolina ETV  
Produced, directed and written by: JEANINE ISABEL BUTLER  
Co-Producers: ALASTAIR REILLY AND CATHERINE LYNN BUTLER

Featured Interviews:

**Gordon Parks** (1912-2006), photographer, musician, poet, novelist, journalist, activist and film director.

**David Kennedy**, Pulitzer Prize Winning Historian, Stanford University

**Jack Hurley**, Historian and author of *Portrait of a Decade, Roy Stryker and the FSA/OWI Photographers*

**William Christenberry**, photographer, painter and sculptor

**Louise Rosskam**, FSA/OWI photographer

**Beverly Brannon**, Curator Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress

**Sally Stein**, Art Historian, University of California, Irvine

**Bernarda Shahn**, Artist and widow of artist and FSA photographer Ben Shahn

**Rondal Partridge**, Photographer

**Roy Emerson Stryker**, Director of the Historical Unit for the FSA/OWI (excerpts from his letters and interview transcripts throughout show) Born in Colorado in 1893, Stryker fought in Europe during WWI and returned to attend Columbia University where he became an assistant professor of economics. Known for his lively lectures and the use of photographs to illustrate abstract economic ideas, Stryker was called to Washington, DC in 1932 to head the Information Division of the Resettlement Administration (later called the Farm Security Administration), a New Deal program designed as a relocation program for poor farmers. During this time, Stryker launched one of the largest government funded documentary photography projects in US history. After leaving the US government in 1942, Stryker went on to amass another incredible collection of photographs for The Standard Oil Corporation. His personal collection of papers and photographs is held by the University of Louisville, Special Collections Unit.

### **About South Carolina ETV**

South Carolina ETV is South Carolina's statewide network with 11 television stations, eight radio stations and a closed-circuit educational telecommunications system in more than 2,000 schools, colleges, businesses and government agencies.

South Carolina ETV brings non-commercial, inspiring public television not only to the citizens of South Carolina, but through its national productions, to the rest of the United States and the world. Recent and upcoming presentations include *The Power of Forgiveness*, *Germans in America*, and *Uncorked! Wine Made Simple*. Past productions include *Making Schools Work* with Hedrick Smith, and *Journey to Planet Earth*, hosted by Matt Damon (the only continuing environmental series on PBS). South Carolina ETV Radio produces *Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz*, NPR's longest running performance program.

For almost 50 years, education has been SCETV's primary mission, harnessing television's enormous power to inform and stimulate young minds. The network's educational commitment now extends from early childhood to adult education. Distance learning and telecourses let students earn college credit or a GED without leaving home. Teachers and other professionals, including childcare providers, regularly update job skills through SCETV. Adults also learn to read through the easily accessible services of SCETV's literacy campaign. SCETV's knowitall.org educational Web portal provides on-line classroom materials that meet state curriculum standards.

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