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Review of Russell Lee Photographs; Images from the Russell Lee Photograph Collection at the Center for American History. By Russell Lee

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Russell Lee Photographs: Images from the Russell Lee Photograph Collection at the Center for American History. By Russell Lee. Foreword by John Szarkowski. Introduction by J. B. Colson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007. xii + 236 pp. Photographs. \$50.00.

Russell Lee, more than any of his compadres in the Farm Security Administration (FSA), created the visual history and thus our collective memory of the Great Depression; and it is fitting that the University of Texas Press in its "Focus on American History Series" has

published a long-overdue book of Lee's images from the Russell Lee photography collection at the University of Texas at Austin's Center for American History, particularly since the Art Department at UT hired Lee in the mid-1960s to be its first professor of photography.

The late John Szarkowski, legendary director of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, provided a foreword filled with the kind of left-handed compliments Lee fans have come to expect from the critical community. However, J. B. Colson, Professor Emeritus of Journalism at UT, in his personal and knowledgeable introduction, cogently states what future photo analysts will echo: "Lee has been credited for bringing flash to FSA documentary work, resulting in pictures that would otherwise have been missed. . . . He mastered some fundamental photographic approaches: strong, complex graphic design with large-format clarity, for which Walker Evans is more noted; sad and sensitive moments, which are seen as Dorothea Lange's legacy, e.g., 'Migrant Mother'; and precise timing of multifaceted action, for which Cartier-Bresson has the premier credit. *He produced images equal to the best work of more honored photographers . . .*" [emphasis mine]. Colson's piece, covering Lee's career and featuring charming and revelatory anecdotes from their long friendship, is filled with previously unpublished facts; and, as a bonus throughout the text, Colson has placed thirty-four photos by Lee, which are appropriate to the content.

The large format hardbound book is a retrospective, and the plates are presented in four sections, each introduced and chronologically arranged by Linda Peterson, Head of Photographic and Digital Archives at UT's Center for American History. They are untitled but explore the human condition, politics, travel, and Texana. She states that, "the human condition is the essential component that unites [Lee's] entire body of work."

The first two sections consist entirely of images made in New York and Texas, the New York images being from Lee's early period during the 1930s. The travel section includes Nova Scotia, Arkansas, South America, Saudi

Arabia, the Ohio River Valley, Louisiana, and Italy. And the last section is of course exclusively Texas. Lee crisscrossed the U.S. during his tenure with the FSA, taking more pictures in more places than any of his colleagues; but in this book his photos from that period are oddly limited as to location, and therefore needlessly limit the scope of Lee's work, especially considering that Peterson had 27,000 images at her disposal. The introduction, however, includes shots from Italy, China, Kentucky, Mexico, New York, and Texas, thus helping to create a more fully framed picture of Russell Lee's extraordinary achievements.

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