

## Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" Photographs in the Farm Security Administration Collection

Discover more about an iconic image from the Farm Security Administration Collection. This guide discusses photographer Dorothea Lange's work, provides other views of Florence Owens Thompson (the Migrant Mother), and lists additional resources.

### Introduction

Migrant Mother Series of Images

Selected Bibliography

### Prints & Photographs

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**Note:** This guide is adapted from  
"Dorothea Lange's 'Migrant Mother'  
Photographs in the Farm Security  
Administration Collection" list,  
previously available on the Prints &  
Photographs Reading Room  
webpage.

**Created:** 1998

**Last Updated:** February 19, 2019

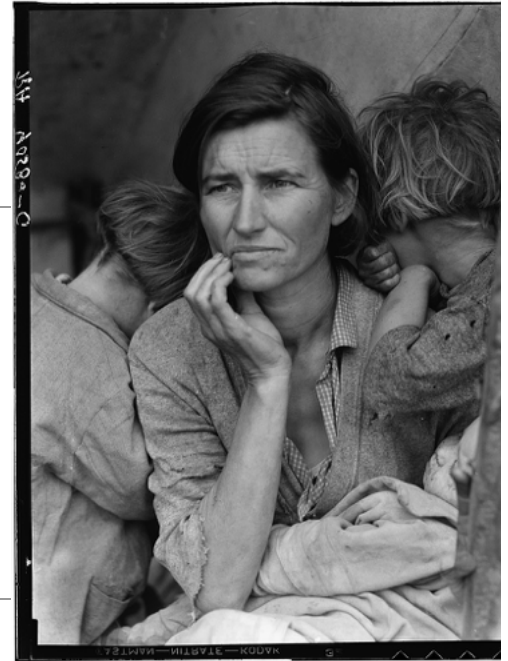
## Introduction

The photograph that has become known as "Migrant Mother" is one of a series of photographs that Dorothea Lange made of Florence Owens Thompson and her children in March of 1936 in Nipomo, California. Lange was concluding a month's trip photographing migratory farm labor around the state for what was then the Resettlement Administration. In 1960, Lange gave this account of the experience:

I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it. (From: Lange's "The Assignment I'll Never Forget: Migrant Mother," *Popular Photography*, Feb. 1960).

The images were made using a Graflex camera. The original negatives are 4x5" film. It is not possible to determine on the basis of the negative numbers (which were assigned later at the Resettlement Administration) the order in which the photographs were taken. Extended captions and supplementary textual files relating to this series in the FSA Written Records have not been found.

- Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information collection overview  
Learn more about the overall collection.
- Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information black-and-white negatives rights statement  
There are no known restrictions on the use of Lange's "Migrant Mother" images. Follow the link to read the collection rights statement.



Dorothea Lange, photographer. *Destitute pea pickers in California. Mother of seven children. Age thirty-two. Nipomo, California. 1936.* U.S. Farm Security Administration/Office of Information. Prints & Photographs Division.

**Subjects:** American Women History, Photography