

Modernism in American

The Farm Securities Administration Photographers (FSA) were a group of artists employed by the US government as part of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s. The FSA photographers were part of a series of government initiatives that responded to the crisis of the Great Depression. The photographers sought to document living conditions across the US during this wide-reaching economic and environmental crisis. The FSA served a number of different purposes; to gather information about the conditions of poor rural people, to provide employment for photographers and sociologists, and to persuade the public of the positive impact of the government's policies during the Great Depression. As modern photographers the FSA were interested in the formal qualities of photography, they focused on light, grain, tone, and composition. The work of the FSA photographers has become a model for documentary photography. The FSA work can be characterized as 'social realist'. Much like older forms of documentary photography, the work aimed to raise awareness of issues such as poverty. While the intentions of the photographers may be admirable, a contemporary interpretation of these works includes questions about the ethics of representing subjects as impoverished.