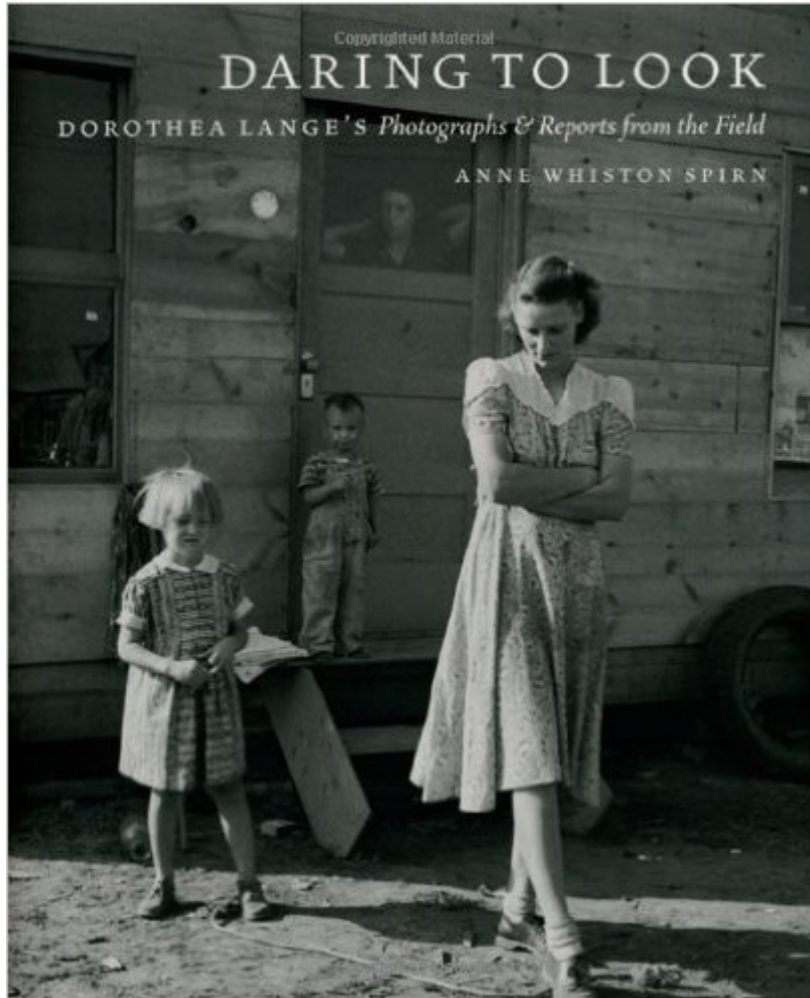


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# Daring To Look: Dorothea Lange's Photographs And Reports From The Field



## Synopsis

Daring to Look presents never-before-published photos and captions from Dorothea Lange's fieldwork in California, the Pacific Northwest, and North Carolina during 1939. Lange's images of squatter camps, benighted farmers, and stark landscapes are stunning, and her captions "which range from simple explanations of settings to historical notes and biographical sketches" add unexpected depth, bringing her subjects and their struggles unforgettably to life, often in their own words. When Lange was dismissed from the Farm Security Administration at the end of 1939, these photos and field notes were consigned to archives, where they languished, rarely seen. With Daring to Look, Anne Whiston Spirn not only returns them to the public eye, but sets them in the context of Lange's pioneering life, work, and struggle for critical recognition "firmly placing Lange in her rightful position at the forefront of American photography. . . . Spirn, a photographer herself, traces Lange's path, visiting her locations and subjects in a fascinating series of "then and now" shots. . . . Publishers Weekly "Dorothea Lange has long been regarded as one of the most brilliant photographic witnesses we have ever had to the peoples and landscapes of America, but until now no one has fully appreciated the richness with which she wove images together with words to convey her insights about this nation. . . . We are lucky indeed that Anne Whiston Spirn, herself a gifted photographer and writer, has now recovered Lange's field notes and woven them into a rich tapestry of texts and images to help us reflect anew on Lange's extraordinary body of work. . . . William Cronon, author of Nature's Metropolis

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anne Spirn's latest book is really quite outstanding. She combines the clear eye of a superlative photographer (her own) to write in limpid prose about the clear eye and conscience of another (Dorothea Lange's). This is not just a meta-documentary, a documentary of a documentary, it is also an examination of the changes that have been wrought in the United States over the last two to three generations, in the physical landscape, in the socio-economy, and in our moral landscape. Lange represented in her photographs some of the critical ironies in the fabric of America - the high mindedness of the WPA program, the debilitating material poverty of her subjects and equally, a spiritual nobility as revealed in the images and her notes. Lange herself, her photographs and the vast subject matter she made her essay are little known in the new generation. Anne Spirn has done the next generation a great service in tilling this soil anew.

of the 4 or 5 dorothea lange books I picked up, this one perhaps has the best selection of photography. Lange's field notes combined with the authors interpretations and cheerleading, which are at times worth skipping, none the less offer a better picture of lange's pictures. Definitely worth the money and an interesting enough read, though the pictures were my focus.

In an age where Cable news channels creative revisionist dream worlds of the past for those with child-like gullibility, this books brings home the truth like a hammer through a window. In the Thirties, the USA was very wealthy but in a great deal of pain as well. Threadbare families wandered the highways, struggling to survive, the direct result of a mismanaged economy. While some partied, others worked for pennies, having lost everything, dressed in rags, and short of food and basic necessities. The quality of the images is stunning. Lange was not only a technically skilled photographer, she also had the people skills to set up the scenes and make the people in the images display their struggles by simply looking into her camera. For those who say that the depression was not all that bad, shove this book into their face and make them look at the images of worn people, skinny kids, and exhausted cars gasping their last combustion stroke. I don't think there's really a bad image anywhere in this heavy duty book. Print quality is excellent.

I've always been drawn to Dorothea Lange's Depression-era photography. No one who ever saw her photo of the sharecropper mother can really forget. This book has an excellent selection of

Lange's work from the depression and after. The author attempts to retrace several of Dorothea Lange's more well known or productive trips for the FSA. The on location shots taken by the author almost 60 years later gave me a perspective on the changes in our landscape. Her description of Lange's evolution from studio based portrait photographer catering to the well off, to on location recorder of the cataclysmic social events going on in the nation during the Depression gave me a new insight about the work Lange produced. Overall, however, the real heart of this book is the selection of Dorothea Lange's photos and the accompanying caption notes by Lange, as well as the expanded background provided by the author. The black and white prints are stark, dramatic and so effective at conveying the suffering as well as the incredible endurance of the people Lange photographed.

The photographs and Lange's field notes make for fascinating reading. I cannot, however, say the same for Ann Spirn's commentary, which at times is downright embarrassing i.e., implying that Lange was not Walker Evan's because she was a woman (as wonderful as many of her photographs are, they often do not rise to the level of Evans' nor did she ever produce a book anything like "American Photographs"). Then there's Spirn's notion that photographs should NOT need to stand on their own, which she seems to think is something of an elitist, or misguided artist perspective. The reality is that it is very unusual to have the benefit of a photographer's writings to assist in evaluating his/her art and, more importantly, the best individual photographs don't need words; one of the best examples -- Lange's Migrant Mother! Buy this book for the photographs and Lange's words, and skip the essays!

If you are a first-time viewer of Lange's work, or a long-time admirer, this is an excellent work to own, and share with friends. In particular, there is a wealth of anecdotal information for many of her images re the circumstances under which a picture was captured. Lange had a gift for establishing rapport with people in very difficult / desperate circumstances. Poverty does not lend itself to "outsiders" peering into it as a gawker let alone with a camera to record the level of misery. That she was able to consistently obtain such images is a testimony to how passionately she plied her craft.

I learned of this book by accident. I was researching my family tree and discovered that Dorothea Lange had taken some pictures of my home state and in particular the county I was born in, even further discovering a link to my family. I was thrilled to receive this in the mail and have enjoyed it immensely. The photographs are marvelous and the story details captivating. Even if you don't have

a particular link to to book itself as I do, it's still worth having in your home.

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