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| **Evans, Walker (1903-1975)** |
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| Walker Evans was an American photographer best known for his work for the Farm Security Administration during the American Depression. His documentary style, historically regarded as detached, is now viewed as characteristic of Evans’s own point of view.   Born in St. Louis, Missouri, to an affluent family, Evans studied literature at Williams College before moving to Paris in 1926. In 1928, Evans moved to New York City and began taking photographs, citing Eugène Atget as an influence. He was given a solo exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1932. He travelled to Havana in the following year. The photographs taken there reveal a country in the midst of a revolution, and were published in *The Crime of Cuba* (1933) alongside text by journalist Carleton Beals. Two years later, Evans began working for *Fortune* magazine, eventually contributing over 400 images to the publication before his departure in 1965. Evans’s penetrating documentary images express an interest in the everyday lives of individuals, balancing senses of both intimacy and detachment. His photographs of the Depression are considered some of the most iconic images of that era.  Evans accepted a 1935 commission from the U.S. Department of the Interior to photograph a community of unemployed coal workers in West Virginia. This eventually developed into a full-time position with the Resettlement Administration, later known as the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Working under director Roy Stryker until 1938, Evans perfected his documentary technique while photographing small-town America. In the summer of 1936, on leave from the FSA, Evans travelled to Alabama with writer James Agee to photograph three sharecropper families — the Burroughs, Tengles, and Fields — for *Fortune*. Evans’s intimate photographs of family members and their possessions reveal the intense poverty facing white sharecroppers during the Dust Bowl period. While *Fortune* rejected the article, the project was published as the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1941. Evans’s sobering frontal portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs, set against the clapboard siding of her rural home, has become an iconic symbol of the Great Depression and female resilience.   File: Evans\_Allie\_Mae\_Burroughs.jpg  Figure 1: Evans, “Allie Mae Burroughs.” Hale County, Alabama (1936). Gelatin silver print. Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum.  In 1938, Evans received the first monographic photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, which displayed his FSA photography. Accompanying the exhibition was a catalogue with an essay written by his friend, cultural impresario Lincoln Kirstein (1907-1996). That same year, Evans began a series of portraits taken with a camera concealed under his coat in the New York City subway system. These candid (and sometimes alarmingly voyeuristic) images were published in *Many Are Called* (1966). In 1965, Evans was appointed professor of photography at Yale University, a post that he held until 1974. Evans died a year later in Lyme, CT.  Evans had a strong influence on later generations of photographers, including those he mentored, such as Helen Levitt (1913-2009). One signal of his influence is the appropriation of his works by postmodernist photographers seeking to rewrite the photographic canon. Sherrie Levine (1947**–**), for example, re-photographed Evans’s work in her 1981 series *After Walker Evans*, including the iconic portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs. Evans’s status as a prime target for such postmodernist interventions ultimately signals his lasting artistic influence.  List of Works  Evans, W. and Agee, J. (1941). *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.   Evans, W. and Agee, J. (1966). *Many Are Called*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. |
| Further reading:  (Galassi)   (Rosenheim, Hambourg and Eklund) |