Following the great finical depression of the 1930 the US government established a set social programs and agencies that were design to help stimulate growth in the national economy. One of these agencies, the Resettlement Administration (RA) was tasked with assisting rural residence recover from the economic hardship. The RA developed a public relations program that sent photographers and journalist to these communities to document their poor conditions for submission to the press.

One of these photographers, Dorothea Lange, ended up taking one of the most iconic images of this error: “Migrant Mother”. Migrant Mother was originally taken in 4x5” format in the winter of 1936 near the town of Nimpo California. During this time Lange was coming to the end of a month long expedition for the RA where she met a subject, she took 4 exposures. This image along with another was initially featured in the San Francisco News illustrated in the subject poor conditions many rural Americans and farming communities were facing at that that time, bringing to the paper over two hundred thousand dollars in donations.

Imagery is so prevalent in todays digital society that people have become desensitized to the concept of there being set of iconic images to define an event. News reports come and go as well as current events and so do largely the images that accompany them.

Citations:

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Image:

Dorothea Lange MIGRANT MOTHER, NIPOMO, CALIFORNIA

February 1936. Gelatin-silver print. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.