

**The Great Depression****Biography**

# Dorothea Lange

1895–1965



**WHY SHE MADE HISTORY** Dorothea Lange was an American photographer famous for her realistic portraits of Americans during the Great Depression.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Dorothea Lange's portraits captured a moment in time.*

Dorothea Lange was an American photographer known for her candid, intimate portraits of American life during the Great Depression and World War II. Lange's most famous subjects were the homeless and laborers.

Dorothea Lange was born in Hoboken, New Jersey. She attended Columbia University in New York, where she studied photography. At age 20, Lange left Columbia to travel the world, earning money by selling her photographs. In San Francisco, Lange opened her own studio, and her reputation as a skilled photographer grew quickly.

During the Great Depression, Lange sought to widen her photographic perspective. She took her camera into the streets of San Francisco, where she captured the lives of the **impoverished**. From this period, Lange is best known for her portrait “White Angel Breadline,” a photo depicting a San Francisco **breadline** in 1932. The publications of Lange’s photographs brought her recognition, and led to a job with the federal Department of Agriculture. Her photos soon brought the conditions of the poor to public attention.

Lange also photographed rural families and **migrant workers**. These portraits showed how drought and the Great Depression affected the



The Granger Collection, New York

**VOCABULARY**

**impoverished** poverty stricken

**breadline** a line of people waiting to receive free food

**migrant workers** farm laborers who move from place to place to harvest seasonal crops

**internment** imprisonment, confinement

**Dorothea Lange, continued****Biography**

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farmers and laborers of America. Lange's most famous portrait, "Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California," shows an impoverished woman with two of her children. Lange's photographs convey strong emotion and offer a glimpse into the lives of her subjects. "Photography takes an instant out of time, altering life by holding it still," Lange once said.

Lange's first exhibition was in 1934. Four years later, a collection of her photographs was published in a book titled *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*. The book secured her reputation as an innovative and skillful photographer.

In 1941 Lange received a Guggenheim Fellowship award. However, Lange gave up the award so that she could photograph and record the mass evacuation of Japanese Americans into **internment** camps after the attack on Pearl Harbor. These and other photo essays were later published in *Life* magazine.

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

- 1.** Name and briefly describe two of Dorothea Lange's photographs.

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- 2. Contrast** How is a photographer's job similar to that of a journalist? How is it different? Explain your answer.

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**ACTIVITY**

- 3.** Write an epitaph for Dorothea Lange on a separate sheet of paper. Summarize her accomplishments in one or two sentences.