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## Podklad pro zadání BAKALÁŘSKÉ práce studenta

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Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Zásady pro vypracování:

I accept proposals to analyze how Great Depression is depicted in a particular literary work (except for *Of Mice and Men* and Erskine Caldwell) or film (such as *The Plow that Broke the Plain* but others as well) or painting (such as Benton, Wood, etc.) or photography (Dorothea Lang, Russell Lee, A. Rothstein, etc.). The paper will combine approaches of literary studies and cultural studies.

Seznam doporučené literatury:

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## **ANNOTATION**

This bachelor thesis inspects the events of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl and also the art of the 1930s in America, focusing on American Regionalism and documentary photography. This paper attempts to show how the crisis influenced the American art of the 1930s and how the Great Depression was depicted. The main focus is on Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton as the representatives of American Regionalism and on Dorothea Lange and Marion Post Wolcott as the representatives of documentary photography.

## **KEYWORDS**

The Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, the New Deal, art, the 1930s, Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, Dorothea Lange, Marion Post Wolcott

## **NÁZEV**

Velká hospodářská krize v literatuře a vizuálním umění

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá události Velké hospodářské krize a sérii prachových bouří. Dále zkoumá umění 30. let v Americe se zaměřením na Americký regionalismus a dokumentární fotografii. Tato práce se pokouší ukázat, jak bylo americké umění 30. let ovlivněno těmito událostmi a jak je v něm vykreslena Velká hospodářská krize. Hlavní důraz je kladen na Granta Wooda, Thomase Harta Bentona jako představitelé Amerického regionalismu a dále pak na Dorotheu Langovou a Marion Post Wolcottovou jako představitelky dokumentární fotografie.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Velká hospodářská krize, prachové bouře, Nový úděl, umění, 30. léta, Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, Dorothea Lange, Marion Post Wolcott

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## 1. Introduction

“There is no cause to worry. The high tide of prosperity will continue.”<sup>1</sup> - Andrew Mellon, Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, September 1929

The first thing a person will remember about the 1920s would be the term Roaring twenties. The 1920s was, in fact, the decade of new opportunities, great music, social change, technological advances, and prosperity. Furthermore, more people were coming to big cities from rural areas of the U.S. in order to get stable employment and regular paychecks. The growing population in urban areas demanded more consumer goods. The United States’ government wanted their citizens to buy goods produced in America, of course, so they placed taxation on foreign goods which were brought to the United States in order to help local people in the business. Former president of the US Calvin Coolidge said: “After all, the chief business of the American people is business. They are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering in the world.”<sup>2</sup> This quote was excluded from the president’s speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, D.C, in 1925. Coolidge praised the principle of *laissez-faire*, which can be translated to English as “allow to do.” It is “a policy of minimum governmental interference in the economic affairs of individuals and society.”<sup>3</sup> Although he supported the small-town believes in thrift and business and the principle of *laissez-fair*, under Coolidge’s presidency, the United States experienced significant expansion in the fields of economy and culture.

Nonetheless, October 29, 1929, was the day that changed the life of every not only American citizen. It was the day of the great crash of the stock market. The 1930s are defined by a global economic crisis. An economic crisis that was so big it is called the Great Depression accompanied by another disaster, an agricultural crisis, the Dust Bowl. Though this period was undoubtedly horrible for the economic and overall life of many people in most of the countries of the world, it is also a particular time when some of the most outstanding art pieces were produced. Because of the economic downturn and the threat of World War II, artists of this

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<sup>1</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash, 1929* (Boston, New York: Mariner Books, 2009), 103.

<sup>2</sup>“When a quote is not (exactly) a quote: The Business of America is Business Edition,” Library of Congress, published January 17, 2019, [https://blogs.loc.gov/inside\\_adams/2019/01/when-a-quote-is-not-exactly-a-quote-the-business-of-america-is-business-edition/](https://blogs.loc.gov/inside_adams/2019/01/when-a-quote-is-not-exactly-a-quote-the-business-of-america-is-business-edition/)

<sup>3</sup> “Laissez-faire,” Britannica, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/laissez-faire>.



period used their creativity to bring to life their visions of the nation to reevaluate the modern times full of, on the one hand, great, on the other hand, destructive inventions and methods. As devastating as the crisis was, artists took it as an opportunity to capture changes in society and their surroundings in paintings, photographs, books, and many others. This decade, like no other before or after, searched for the unity of the U.S. nation.

The thesis focuses on the events of the great economic and agricultural crisis of the 1930s in the United States of America. Further, there follows an analysis of Roosevelt's New Deal, more specifically the First Hundred Days as a whole, and later there is an emphasis put on the Federal Art Project and the Farm Security Administration due to the significant theme of this paper, which is art. After examining Roosevelt's precautions in the form of the New Deal, one will be introduced to American art of the 1930s. The thesis is interested in Social Realism and Regionalism, examining the lives and works of Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton. The examination also applies to the influence of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl on American art. It discusses how the crisis is depicted in some of the most famous artworks created during the critical situation and how it was perceived by the conservative classes in the U.S. This is followed by exploring the topic of documentary photography and the two women representatives Dorothea Lange and Marion Post Wolcott. The emphasis is put on the artists with respect to the period they collaborated with the government as the artists of the New Deal.

## 2. The Great Depression

The Great Depression was the worst economic downswing within the history of the industrialized world. It did not affect the United States of America only but also every country around the globe. Every state, kingdom, or any other political territory was suffering from the effects and aftermaths of the Great Depression. For example, Adolf Hitler used the German people's despair as a rallying call, which Hitler took advantage of and created the Nazi party. This later on, as known, escalated into World War II. In order to understand the desperation of all the people, it is a need to explain the causes and effects of the Great Depression. The experts and historians who are interested in the issue still, to this day, do not fully agree on the possible causes of the economic crisis; thus, one can only speculate and rely on theories.

After the end of World War I., the European countries were indebted to the United States. At that time, America was the strongest industrial and financial power because it was not as disturbing as the other countries by the Great War. America was financially stable. There were profitable companies and banks as well, which started to give loans to everybody. Everyone, even ordinary people, started to invest, which gave rise to the stock market. People who did not have money to invest borrowed them. For the first time, working-class' families could afford a car on credit, meaning they paid for it later. However, people forgot about the vicissitude of the stock market and invested their whole life savings. "They were eager to get some of this easy money."<sup>4</sup> Then, banks began to invest too, and unfortunately, they soon started to borrow money from their customers' accounts without them knowing. The companies' goods were excessive and were available to most of the citizens. The market was overwhelmed. To the year 1927, the stock market kept growing, and between the years 1927 to 1929, the overall fortune of the investment companies grew up to ten times. However, in 1929, the companies' production slowed down because everyone had enough, and people stopped buying as much as they used to. So, as has been noted, the companies gradually slowed down their products' production, which led to unemployment. Experts warned before the collapse of the stock market, but nobody paid attention. On October 29, 1929, the stock market crashed. This day is also known as Black Tuesday and is considered the beginning of the Great Depression.

The investors panicked and sold all their holdings. Sadly, all the selling dragged the stock market down, and it gradually erased America's wealth. Furthermore, some shares were now

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<sup>4</sup> Bryn O'Callaghan, *An Illustrated History of the USA* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), 96.

worthless. As has been noted above, people invested their life savings, which they now lost, people who borrowed money were crushed. Some even committed suicide. Banks that took money from their customers lost it in markets, so they got almost nothing back. Many businesses closed, and the unemployment grew. In the 1930s, there were more than half a million unemployed people, and in the following years, the number kept growing. Many people asked why this happened. Some blamed it on politicians; others accused the greed of investors. However, the real cause was elsewhere. It was straightforward yet peremptory. There were too many products made in the USA which nobody would buy. Although the U.S. nation accumulated its wealth, solely little of it landed in the hands of the country's employees and farmers.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the foreign business was also at risk. In particular, Europe was severely affected by the consequences of World War I, so it did not prosper at all, and because America had lent money to Europe to finance the war, now in the time of extreme need, they requested it back. However, Europe could not afford that, so as a consequence, most of the American sales dried up completely. This is what the crash of the stock market caused. However, there was one more surprise for the United States, but this time nobody could have predicted that.

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<sup>5</sup> Bryn O'Callaghan, *An Illustrated History of the USA* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), 97.

### 3. The Dust Bowl

To add to the horrible events of the Great Depression, it is a need to speak about The Dust Bowl, which made already the problematic life of the American people even worse. The Dust Bowl was a natural disaster. The 1930s was a period of severe dust storms which significantly damaged the preservation and agriculture of the Midwest of the United States. The term Dust Bowl is often referred to as if it was a single event; however, it consisted of several episodes of drought.

Before World War I., the grasslands were mainly used for stock raising, and after that, the soil was adapted for wheat production. In the following years of the 1920s, the soil was over-used by excessive planting, causing the soil to lose its richness. Additionally, the management of the land was abysmal. Gradually, the typical Midwest region climate changed. The Midwest's weather was characteristically humid continental climate even during the driest months. Nevertheless, the 1930s was a period of unprecedented drought, and it lasted for several years. The bare topsoil of the Great Plains was left exposed with no rain or grasses to keep the soil healthy and heavy, keeping it low on the ground. The upcoming strong winds raised thousands of tons of dust from the dry soil. The dust storms, which occurred regularly in that period, were so damaging, people were not able to recover from them before another storm came. Consequently, one storm brought the second, which created a cycle of chaos that covered the sun for days. The Dust Bowl affected the entire Midwestern region. However, the most damaged areas were Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, parts of Nebraska, and the Texas Panhandle. In his book *Americans held hostage by the environmentalist movement*, Bruce Schlink states that by 1934, it had been calculable that one hundred million acres of farmland had lost all or most of the soil to the winds.<sup>6</sup> Much of the soil ended up as sediments in the Atlantic Ocean. People named the sediments “the black blizzards.” The windblown soil blocked the sun, and it accumulated in the hills. The worst of the storms happened on April 14, 1935, and its dust coated several entire states. This day is nicknamed “the Black Sunday.” A teacher Taleta Elfeldt remembers this day:

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce Schlink, *Americans held hostage by the environmentalist movement* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: RoseDog Books, 2012), 372.

One day in March 1934, my beginners were busy reading. All of a sudden there was total darkness. It was as though a huge curtain had been drawn around our building. I realized a dust storm had hit because soon the room was filled with a ‘fog of dust’. We teachers walked home holding wet towels over our faces in order to breathe.<sup>7</sup>

There were even cases when the teacher let the students stay at school overnight so they would not get lost walking home or be overwhelmed by dust.

Consequently, thousands of families were forced to leave the Midwest region. Well over three million Americans migrated to other regions of the United States, many of them migrated to California. The city environment promised better economic opportunities and a fresh start. Unfortunately, the situation in California was not in a much better condition because of the ongoing economic crisis. It is essential to know that not all those who were affected by the Dust Bowl were farmers. Not even a half of those who were forced to move to other states during the 1930s were working on their farmlands before the storms. Some of these people also white-collar workers who were not involved in agriculture at all. The area where the storms hit the hardest was Oklahoma who lost over 440 000 residents who moved mainly to the West for work. As mentioned above, most of them settled in California, more specifically in the agriculturally rich San Joaquin Valley.

The period of the Great Depression, together with the Dust Bowl period, was devastating for American citizens. For ten years, millions of Americans suffered unimaginable hardships as a result of the Dust Bowl. People suffered not only from the destruction of their property, the loss of their homes, and hunger, but they also suffered from dust pneumonia. The storms killed crops across hundreds of millions of acres, and by 1936 the economic cost of the storms reached twenty-five million dollars a day which was not great considering the ongoing economic crisis. The Dust Bowl was the outcome of irresponsible farming connected with the unexpected climate change, and the impact on the population in the Dust Bowl lasted for decades. Thus, one can object that the Americans brought the Dust Bowl upon themselves, which would be an incorrect statement since the weather in the Midwest region was unpredictable. However, this factor of the cause of the Dust Bowl should not be overlooked. However, there were coming new precautions and policies which were here to bring peace into people’s lives once again.

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<sup>7</sup> “Calling off School for Dust,” Living History Farm, accessed on March 30, 2021, [https://livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/water\\_04.html](https://livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/water_04.html).

## 4. The New Deal

Herbert Hoover was elected president of the USA shortly before the stock market crash, so the problems of the Great Depression became quite the central concern of his policy. He, as well as Calvin Coolidge, believed in the laissez-faire principle and American individualism, and he acted upon it. However, the crisis made it very clear that there was a need for the government to act differently; there was a more direct approach needed. Unfortunately, President Hoover refused to change his policies. He simply advised American people to be humble and to “tighten their belts.”<sup>8</sup> By all means, this was not enough to keep the economy from descending and chaos. In 1932 many people got really desperate with the situation they appeared in, and protests began to take place in the streets of America. “In Hoover we trusted, now we are busted,”<sup>9</sup> yelled the crowds. People were very unsatisfied by Hoover’s policy at that time.

In the presidential election of 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a member of the democratic party, won against President Hoover, a member of the republican party. By promising to deal with the horrible situation, the overall crisis’s residue, and by promising help to the victims of the Depression, Roosevelt earned the trust of the American citizens. He said to the Americans: “The country needs and demands bold, persistent experimentation. Above all, try something.”<sup>10</sup> And on that note, he suggested a plan for saving the American economy called the New Deal. The New Deal is a term used for a set of precautions and reforms which promised to handle the consequences of the Great Depression. As mentioned, the consequences were high unemployment, homelessness, a practically non-existent financial system, poor living conditions of the American population, and others. The New Deal’s goal was to bring immediate economic relief to people who had lost their jobs and to come up with specific reforms to prevent a repetition of the stock market crash. Its focus can be summarized into the three “Rs” – relief, recovery, and reform. The relief provided for unemployed people living in poverty, recovery of the economy, and reform focused on the financial system as a whole. There were in total sixty-nine programs and policies created as part of the New Deal, whereas seven of them are still valid in the U.S. to this day.

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<sup>8</sup> “President Hoover’s Response,” Lumen Learning, accessed on February 15, 2021, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-ushistory2os2xmaster/chapter/president-hoovers-response/>.

<sup>9</sup> “The Great Depression,” 1929-1933,” BBC, accessed on February 15, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zxy3k2p/revision/7>.

<sup>10</sup> Bryn O’Callaghan, *An Illustrated History of the USA* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), 99.

#### 4.1 The First Hundred Days

When Roosevelt officially took over the status of the president of the United States and immediately started acting upon his promises. There were several areas in which changes were necessary. Those were the areas of the financial system, unemployment, industry, and agriculture.

The first and most urgent problem to solve concerned the bank system and the financial system as a whole. In March 1933, Roosevelt declared the Bank Holiday. All banks were closed for four days, and in the meantime, the government's officials inspected the banks in order to separate the malfunctioning banks from the efficient ones. Soon after that, Roosevelt declared one of the few legislations for financial regulations, the Emergency Banking Act. It was supposed to stabilize the banking system and restore the confidence of the U.S. nation in it. In other words, they wanted to get people to trust in the banking system in order to put their money back in banks, which they eventually accomplished by reopening only banks which were financially stable. Under the supervision of the government and the U.S. Treasury, banks were prevented from making uncertain loan which they had the suspicion would not be paid back. It allowed the U.S. Treasury to have more power "to issue currency and prevent the hoarding of gold."<sup>11</sup> Another critical policy was the Economy Act. It cut government employees' wages by 15%, including the president himself. The goal of this act was to save the government's money.

Another issue to solve was unemployment. At that time, there were around 25% of unemployed people in the U.S. Roosevelt attempted to solve it through mortgage relief and unemployment relief. Mortgage relief consisted of two programs, the Farm Credit Administration, which was, as the name suggests, targeting farmers who were prone to losing their farms and home by refinancing farm loans, and the Home Owners Loan Corporation, which refinanced home loans in order to avoid the foreclosure. Speaking of unemployment relief, in May 1933, the government passed the Federal Emergency Relief Act. It was, as the name suggests, to provide relief to those in need. They set aside five hundred million dollars to give them to states and local government so they could, for instance, organize soups kitchens and in other ways provide help for most of the people in need. Nevertheless, Roosevelt did not want to give out the money for people to live out of them forever, so he also provided jobs by the Civilian Conservation Corps. This program was, in fact, the most popular amongst the American public. The program created 250 000 jobs for young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who were

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<sup>11</sup> Anne E. Schraff and Barbara Silberdick Feinberg, *The Great Depression and the New Deal: America's economic collapse and recovery* (New York: F. Watts, 1990), 52.

unmarried and unemployed and whose families were in need of relief from unemployment. The job concerned taking care of nature in rural lands and make sure it flourished, maintaining parks, and also plant new trees. These young men lived in government camps, national parks, forests, or other rural areas and were paid thirty dollars a month for their work. Another program designed to fight unemployment was the Public Work Administration which provided money for public works projects such as building roads, bridges, dams, etc.

The industry was the third area to be concerned about. There was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), and its goals were the recovery of industry and to create fair wages and hours for workers. It accomplished to improved working conditions and made child labor illegal. The companies under the NIRA were not to compete with each other but to work and function in order to fix wages and prices which would meet the established production quotas. Under this order, the companies were to adopt this new principle of working. The first principle or code was to reduce the destructive competition by not promoting monopolies in order to allow small enterprises to have an equal opportunity to succeed. The second code was to set a minimum wage and a maximum number of hours allowed to be worked in one week. Finally, the last code was to set a minimum price at which a product could be sold. All these precautions were expected to provide a plan for the economy in order to grow steadily and to prevent any possible crisis in the future

The last area which was talked about in Roosevelt's first hundred years was agriculture. The main problems in the field of agriculture were overproduction, low prices for the goods in the 1920s and in the period of World War I, and, on top of that, the Dust Bowl. There was the Agricultural Adjustment Act to help rural people. In the act, Roosevelt persuaded farmers to cut on their production and, as, one could say, a reward they received payments in return. In other words, the farmers were paid not to grow, to limit their production. After 1933 the prices of farm goods increased, and the agricultural sector as a whole eventually improved.

Franklin D. Roosevelt also established the so-called "Fireside chats," which were delivered from 1933 to 1944, where he visited a radio station every week and spoke to people. First, the chats were to gain support for the New Deal legislation, but they eventually became something more. On March 12, 1933, Roosevelt aired his first episode of the fireside chats. There he first spoke about the banking situation. He explained what his plans were for mending the broken system, acknowledging the fact that he was speaking to ordinary people who might not have to understand the banking terms and the overall jargon. He also assured people not to be afraid of



trusting the American banking system again, that they do not have to hoard their possessions by saying:

It is possible that when the banks resume a very few people who have not recovered from their fear may again begin withdrawals. Let me make it clear that the banks will take care of all needs—and it is my belief that hoarding during the past week has become an exceedingly unfashionable pastime.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that he did speak about his policies, about what people might expect, what he was doing, and why. On the other hand, in his subsequent chats, he also spoke about his day, what he had for lunch about walking his dog, and other of his activities. He spoke to the people as their friend, not as their president. This simple act of his helped to regain trust in the U.S. government, and it became a source of hope and assurance for the American people.

In the first hundred days of Roosevelt's presidency, Congress passed more laws than in any other time in American history. After Roosevelt's first hundred days in the status of president of the USA, it was apparent to all that he will be a successful president. Not only was he helping to manage the whole situation, but he was also spiritually supporting the citizens by speaking to them regularly on the radio, as mentioned above. It is clear that the New Deal programs were not perfect, and not all people were saved from the crisis and actually lost their homes. Nevertheless, the New Deal helped to prevent it from happening for many more people. Roosevelt helped to provide new jobs and did not forget about artists well. The solution to the problems of this particular group of citizens was also contained in the New Deal but was established later. The two programs this thesis will cover are the Federal Art Project and the Farm Security Administration.

#### **4.2 The Federal Art Project**

One of the New Deal programs was the Federal Art Project (FAP), established in 1935. It was running under the directions of Holger Cahill, an Icelandic-American writer, and its projects were funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The WPA was the umbrella term for all public works programs contained in the New Deal. The majority of jobs provided by the WPA were construction works of, for example, bridges, airports, schools, or parks.<sup>13</sup> However, there was a program, the Federal Project Number One, which was created to support artists and

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<sup>12</sup> "March 12, 1933: Fireside Chat 1: On the Banking Crisis," Miller Center, accessed on March 30, 2021, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-12-1933-fireside-chat-1-banking-crisis>.

<sup>13</sup> "Works Progress Administration (WPA) (1935)," The Living New Deal, accessed on February 16, 2021, <https://livingnewdeal.org/glossary/works-progress-administration-wpa-1935>.

provide job opportunities for them. The FAP was a part of the Federal Project Number One. It served to fund the visual arts in the United States. Not only that the FAP employed a considerable number of artists in numerous media – painters, sculptors, muralists, and graphic artists, with various expertise levels,<sup>14</sup> but the program also sponsored their work and organized the art education programs. In these programs, the employed artists were paid to educate the public on some techniques of making art, such as metal crafts, pottery, puppet making, and others. In addition, the FAP gave rise to art galleries and art centers where the general public could enjoy the exhibitions and also, they could take art courses. On the one hand, the art of the FAP, or the art of the New Deal, was advantageous in the field of decoration and education in the USA. On the other hand, it reached far beyond these aspects. The New Deal art was made to extend far beyond the American border and share the American experience. In her book called *Democratic Art: The New Deal's Influence on American Culture*, Sharon Ann Musher says that the administrators of the FAP and their art wanted to inspire the communal feeling of togetherness in order to uplift the national enthusiasm, to advocate social justice and perhaps to encourage people in creating their own works of art no matter their level of experience. Everything they wished for was for people not to be shy and create while recognizing the originality in what they made.<sup>15</sup>

### **4.3 The Farm Security Administration**

The Federal Art Project helped and employed many artists. However, the ones who suffered the most from the Great Depression were farmers. Not only did they have to deal with the economic crisis, but they also faced a string of natural disasters, together with floods and dirt storms. Thousands of families had to migrate to California in search of work. The Farm Security Administration (FSA), similarly to the FAP, was a part of the New Deal program created by President Roosevelt. It was established in 1937 and was there to fight rural poverty. Moreover, it was supposed to improve every poor farmer's lifestyle, invest in marginal land owned by poor farmers, and settle them in shared farms that were more efficient for agriculture. On top of that, in the years of 1935 to 1944, the FSA was employing a team of photographers to document the lives of the migrant laborers. This photography project was headed for most of its existence by Roy Emerson Stryker, an economist, and a journalistic photographer. Under his guidance, the pictures were to support the FSA program and its goals. Unlike the FAP, which

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<sup>14</sup> "Federal Art Project," Library of Congress, accessed November 19, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/newdeal/fap.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Sharon Ann Musher, *Democratic Art: The New Deal's Influence on American Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 147.

could employ any artist, the FSA program hired their photographers mainly according to their talent and experiences. They were hired to create illustrated reports on how the nation was impacted by the Great Depression, emphasizing the rural Americans. The photographers documented in the areas of the Great Plains and Southwest. Not only were they supposed to take pictures but also to provide information of what or who was in them as well as “shooting scripts”<sup>16</sup> which were needed to bring necessary data if needed. There are about 265 000, 165 000 prints, and 1 600 color slides in the FSA archive, making it the most extensive collection of photographs in history.<sup>17</sup>

The aftermath of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl projected into many fields and areas of the economic system, agriculture, ordinary life of people, and culture of the USA altogether. In other words, every citizen living in that time was influenced by the situation. As has been noted, Franklin D. Roosevelt, former president of the USA, organized the New Deal program to help the citizens to manage to live their lives as usual as possible and, of course, to pull America out of the overall crisis. Agencies, such as the FAP, were there to support American artists. As terrible as the events were, they gave birth to some of the most famous, competent, and talented artists who spread the message and horrors of these horrible events so the world can never forget them.

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<sup>16</sup> Miles Orvell, *American photography* (Oxford, New York: Oxford history of art, 2003), 110.

<sup>17</sup> Miles Orvell, *American photography* (Oxford, New York: Oxford history of art, 2003), 110.

## 5. Art of the Great Depression

The New Deal programs concerning artworks completely changed the view of the public on artists and also art as a whole. Before the Great Depression, the theory and practice of art were available only in colleges, occasionally in museums, or one could learn in private lessons. After the crash and with the implementation of new policies and reforms of the government system, the education of art became available to all. The places available for learning about art were expanded into every corner of the U.S. nation. Even today, some artworks still can be found in public buildings such as hospitals, subway stations, post offices, or schools. Under the leadership of the FAP, thousands of paintings, sculptures, murals, prints, and other types of works, were created and helped to expand and preserve the American legacy. Being so ubiquitous, art was experienced but also created by all. Franklin D. Roosevelt stated that:

The American people have discovered that they have a part. They have seen in their own towns, in their own villages, in schoolhouses, in post offices, in the back rooms of shops and stores, pictures painted by their sons, their neighbors - people they have known and lived beside and talked to. They have seen, across these last few years, rooms full of painting and sculpture by Americans, walls covered with painting by Americans - some of it good, some of it not so good, but all of it native, human, eager, and alive- all of it painted by their own kind in their own country, and painted about things that they know and look at often and have touched and loved. The people of this country know now, whatever they were taught or thought they knew before, that art is not something just to be owned, but something to be made: that it is the act of making and not the act of owning that is art. And knowing this, they know also that art is not a treasure in the past or an importation from another land, but part of the present life of all the living and creating peoples—all who make and build; and, most of all, the young and vigorous peoples who have made and built our present wide country.<sup>18</sup>

The president gave this speech at the dedication of the National Gallery of Art in 1941. Nevertheless, it is a beautiful summary of what the FAP provided for American citizens.

The 1930s was a period of experiments, new forms, and methods appearing in every area of creating arts. The thesis discusses Social Realism as the most flourishing art movement in the 1930s in America, Regionalism as the most famous art movement amongst ordinary people and their criticism. Further, the bachelor's paper deals with documentary photography as

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<sup>18</sup> "Address at the Dedication of the National Gallery of Art," The American Presidency Project, accessed on February 17, 2021, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-dedication-the-national-gallery-art>.

another essential type of art of that time. To each type of virtuosity, there will be mentioned, two representatives.

### **5.1 Social Realism and Regionalism in the United States**

Between the artists of the 1930s, there was an argument whether they should follow the trends of European modernism or if they should be original and try something new. Artists of modernism were trying to abandon the traditional forms of art, which were considered old-fashioned and out-of-date. The art movement used the techniques of abstraction, surrealism, expressionism, and others. “Modernism was essentially based on a utopian vision of human life and society and a belief in progress, or moving forward.”<sup>19</sup> However, the art of modernism was confusing for many people. It was too difficult to understand. Many American artists turned away from it, rejecting the ideas of a romanticized and ideal world and embraced the beauty and uniqueness of their own land. Artists of realism were much more popular amongst ordinary people because their art was simple. It showed everyday life, familiar land, and the traditional customs of Americans. In their artworks, artists expressed their opinions on what was happening, their reactions towards homelessness, hunger, poverty, and other terrible experiences people had to live through. These artists can be included in the Social Realism movement, which is closely related to Regionalism. On top of that, some artists were involved in both of these movements, for instance, Thomas Hart Benton. However, there is a difference between these two movements. Social Realism focuses on urban landscapes and scenes, draws attention towards social and political conditions, and criticizes them. On the other hand, Regionalists focused on rural landscapes and farmers. Social Realism became very important in the 1930s because it reacted against Idealism and Romanticism. Speaking about art and the movement of Social Realism, it is also a must to speak about the Ashcan School because Social Realism was directly influenced by it. The organization was established in around 1891, and the founders are considered to be an artist and a teacher Robert Henri together with his colleagues William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan, who studied and later worked together in Philadelphia. They are reckoned as the first generation of the Ashcan School, the second generation being many of Henri’s students. Henri and his followers revolted against the National Academy of Design, whose art was rather conservative. They disliked Impressionism which they rated as shallow and empty. The Ashcan School artists pictured urban society and everyday life

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<sup>19</sup> “The Rise of Modernism,” Lumen Learning, accessed on February 16, 2021, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-arthistory/chapter/the-rise-of-modernism/>.

most frequently in poor districts of New York in a very realistic, even brutalist, manner. Henri claimed that “there is only one reason for art in America, and that is that the people of America learn the means of expressing themselves in their own time and their own land.”<sup>20</sup> An art critic Robert Hughes in his television series *American Visions* from 1997, declared that “Henri wanted art to be akin to journalism. He wanted the paint to be as real as mud, as the clods of horse-shit and snow, that froze on Broadway in the winter, as real a human product as sweat, carrying the unsuppressed smell of human life.”<sup>21</sup> One of the most famous artworks is, for example, the painting from 1925 *The Breaker Boys* by George Luks, depicting four young boys which were known as “the breaker boys,” coal-mining workers. In the painting, they are sitting on wooden boxes, cleaning the grimes from the coal with their bare hands. Luks is known for his interest in portraying naughty children in the streets, wrestlers, or vendors of New York’s streets. With this painting, he pointed out the horrible and dangerous conditions in which the children had to work. The members of the Ashcan School did not consider themselves to be an organized group or a movement and had different occupations; nevertheless, they shared one common goal, and that was to be truthful with their art.

One must be careful not to confuse the term Social Realism with Socialist Realism, a Soviet art form, which was institutionalized as the official style in the Soviet Union in 1932 and continued to exist until the year 1988. Additionally, it was later adopted by communist parties from the whole world. Socialist Realism portrayed communist values, and in contrast with Social Realism, it was controlled by the state, so any pessimistic element or criticism was not allowed. Therefore, one must know the difference due to the very perspicuous and distinct features of the two movements.

As mentioned above, the Ashcan School heavily influenced Social Realism and the art of the Great Depression-era as a whole.

Another movement that one can call a branch of Social Realism is Regionalism. Regionalists were the most famous group of painters of the 1930s, and the decade is known as the period of American Regionalism which was at its peak from 1930 to 1935. The artists knew what was unique about their homelands, their regions, and it was this uniqueness they wanted to show other people. They wanted to depict the beauty of the countryside, perhaps

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<sup>20</sup> YouTube, “Robert Hughes – American Visions – Episode 5 (part2/5), posted October 13, 2009, YouTube video: 10:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51Fx3es6Dmg&t=77s>.

<sup>21</sup> YouTube, “Robert Hughes – American Visions – Episode 5 (part2/5), posted October 13, 2009, YouTube video: 10:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51Fx3es6Dmg&t=77s>.

in comparison to the grey and dangerous urban life. Some artists wanted to put people's minds off of the miseries of their life at the time by portraying the splendors, innocence, and unsophistication of the countryside. Others realistically portrayed the reality of the everyday life of ordinary people and rural communities in their home regions. Their inspiration was the history of a region, the landscapes surrounding them, and also the pre-industrial America and its old values. By creating art, which was so familiar to everybody, the artists reached broader layers of the public. They believed that art should be apprehensible by all.<sup>22</sup> The goal of the American Regionalists was to create something, some type of art that would be purely American. As mentioned above, they rejected European modernism and the idea of abstraction. The founders and also dominant figures of American Regionalism are Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry. This thesis contains the knowledge of the life and artworks of Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton.

## **5.2 Grant Wood**

One of the most famous artists of the period of the Great Depression was Grant Wood. He was born in 1891 in the state of Iowa. His origin became his inspiration in the creation of many of his artworks. He was primarily focused on the rural environment and the portrayal of farmers. For example, his well-known painting from 1930 called *Stone City* shows a harmonious landscape of Iowa with well-kept farms, a clear view of clean and neat fields, and bushy green trees. Although this painting looked nothing like the actual image of the scenery in that time because of the aftermath of the Dust Bowl, Wood wanted to reassure America that everything would go back to normal, that the beauty of the landscape captured in *Stone City* would be restored one day.

Since a very young age, he was interested in making art. After he graduated from Washington High School in 1910, he continued developing and further amplifying his creative abilities. He sacrificed many years of his life to studying several art fields in the Minneapolis School of Design, Handicraft, and Normal Art, at the University of Iowa and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. After his studies, he served in World War I., where he was creating clay models of gun positions and also helped camouflage artillery items. Returning from the war, he then traveled across Europe to find inspiration. Nevertheless, as beautiful as the European scenery was, his travels gave him deeper appreciation and recognition for his home, the

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<sup>22</sup> "The 1930s Arts and Entertainment: Topics in the News," Encyclopedia.com, published January 12, 2021, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/culture-magazines/1930s-arts-and-entertainment-topics-news>.

Midwest. “I regret the years I spent searching for tumble-down houses that looked ‘Europy,’” said Wood. “I know that our cardboard frame houses on Iowa farms have a distinct American quality and are very paintable.”<sup>23</sup> When he returned home to Cedar Rapids, where his mother and sister moved after Wood’s father’s death, he taught art at a local high school where he focused on landscape painting, work with metal and sculpture crafting from used and found materials. Furthermore, by creating his artworks, he tried to get American art out of European art shadow. As mentioned above, his talents lay in many branches of art. In the world, he is most known for his work, where he depicted the beauty of the Midwest region, its people, and landscapes, as shown in the example of the *Stone City* above. As mentioned above, he is considered one of the founders of American Regionalism and is looked upon as one of American Regionalism’s three primary artists. As a regionalist, he believed in his home region’s uniqueness, in the beauty of ordinary life and ordinary people. Wood’s works targeted farmers, small-town individuals, and Iowa landscapes that pictured farming life as undefeated, freelance manner of life.<sup>24</sup> On top of that, he was trying to put American art in the foreground of European art. Being the Federal Art Project artist, Grant Wood helped educate young artists, and together they brought regionalist arts to the public.

Fascinated by the beauty of the landscapes of his home, Iowa, he created his first major painting, the previously mentioned *Stone City, Iowa*. This image is based on a real place Wood knew undoubtedly well; however, he added some features which added some magic to the painting itself. “Although *Stone City, Iowa* (1930) was based on a direct study of a place with which he was thoroughly acquainted, he turned this village and its river valley site into a fantasy of curving contours, ornamental trees, and brightly patterned surfaces,”<sup>25</sup> confirms the group of authors in their book *Grant Wood: An American Master Revealed*. The *Stone City* used to be at its peak, the so-called “boomtown” because it had been built on a limestone quarry. However, due to the development of Portland cement, the most common type, the beauty of the town rapidly declined. The *Stone City, Iowa* painting thus remains to be a remarkable memory of Wood’s recollection of what it looked like before the decline.

The *Stone City, Iowa* painting was made in the same year as perhaps the most famous American painting is Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*. These two works together launched

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<sup>23</sup> “Regionalist art and literature,” *The Goldfinch* 8, no. 4 (April 1987): 8.

<sup>24</sup> “Grant Wood,” National Gallery of Art, published August 17, 2018, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.1982.html>

<sup>25</sup> Brady M. Roberts, James M. Dennis, James S. Hornes and Helen Mar Parkin, *Grant Wood: An American Master Revealed* (Petaluma, California: Pomegranate Communications, Inc., 1995), 46.



Wood's career. It depicts a couple standing in front of their house with its pointed Gothic window, dressed earnestly. The painting realistically portrays agrarian people and landscape. It, in a large portion, represents America, especially the Midwestern region and its small towns. Since the beginning, it was claimed these two figures on the painting are related by blood; more specifically, they are a father and a daughter. However, when seeing the painting for the first time, most people thought they were husband and wife. Nevertheless, nowadays, it is a known fact that it was Wood's sister, Nan Wood Graham, and their dentist, Dr. Byron McKeeby, who stood as models for this painting. On top of that, the painter's sister herself insisted that the individuals were meant to be father and daughter. The title, *American Gothic*, refers to the house in the background of the painting. He and his sister were at breakfast one day in 1930 in their hometown Iowa. His attention was caught by a white house with a Gothic window. He quickly sketched this little cottage on an envelope, and it became the base for his future famous painting. He said: "This is what I plan to paint. A Gothic house with two people standing in front of it. They will be people with the long faces-the type who would live in a Gothic house."<sup>26</sup>

The reason behind creating the painting is still unclear. Some Iowa farmers even thought that Wood was making fun of them, mocking them. On top of that, some critics also accused him of portraying America negatively. If one looks at the painting, specifically at the couple, they might think that they belong to a religious sect, that they are religious fanatics, which can be seen mainly through the choice of their clothes. However, Wood insisted that his painting was not meant to be intended as a satire and that the figures were expected to be good people. Nevertheless, most of the artists of that time wanted their figures in their paintings to reflect the U.S.'s development. On top of that, they used them to keep alive the national spirit and to portray ideals of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> "Wood's figures have been imprisoned by them,"<sup>28</sup> claims Baigell. The face reflection of the man and woman in Wood's painting, *the American Gothic*, is lifeless. There is no hope, no joy of life, no warmth in their frowning

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<sup>26</sup> Nan Wood Graham, *My Brother, Grant Wood* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1993), 1.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Baigell, *A history of American painting* (New York, Washington: Praeger publishers, 1971), 225.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew Baigell, *A history of American painting* (New York, Washington: Praeger publishers, 1971), 225.

appearances. “The man and his wife are dead spirits. Like the country in which they are living, they, too, have lost their bearings.”<sup>29</sup>

Grant Wood never imagined the success and appreciation *the American Gothic* would have. The painting won the Norman Wait Harris Bronze Medal at the Forty-third Art Institute of Chicago Annual of American Painting and Sculpture in 1930. On top of that, three years later, in 1933, the picture was exhibited at the Chicago Century of Progress Fair event for the first time, and it can still be found there today. Since so many people saw the painting, it gained popularity, which consequently turned the masterpiece into a million parodies, which Nan Wood Graham herself collected and decorated her bedroom with them. This is the painting everybody knows, even if they have not seen the original piece. *The American Gothic* is a notable national symbol, an icon of the U.S. nation.

### **5.3 Thomas Hart Benton**

Thomas Hart Benton is another representative of Regionalism, and he is considered one of the most influential American artists of the 1930s. He was born in 1889 in Missouri. His father, Maecenas Eason Benton, was a Democratic member of Congress and hoped his son would continue to carry his interests as a politician. Unwillingly, he was sent to Western Military Academy. However, his studies there did not last for long, and after almost two years, he left this academy to pursue his dream of being an artist. He began his studies at the Art Institute of Chicago and continued to study abroad at the Academie Julian in Paris. While studying there, he made himself familiar with synchromism, a type of art that uses specific types of techniques and colors to illustrate the music. After finishing his education, Benton moved to New York. His first job was painting sets for silent movies, which gave him extensive experience and skills so he could devote himself to the painting of murals. During World War I, he joined the Navy, where he, similarly to Grant Wood, was hired to camouflage ships that sailed into the dock. After the War, Benton taught art. First at school supported by the city of New York and then at the independent Art Students League of New York founded by artists in 1875. Since then, the institution supports young artists who want to continue in American legacy by creating art. One of Benton’s students at the Art Students League was a brilliant artist, a representative of expressionism, and also a member of the FAP’s artists, Jackson Pollock.

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew Baigell, *A history of American painting* (New York, Washington: Praeger publishers, 1971), 225.

Thomas Hart Benton is most known for his astonishing murals, painting, and prints of the U.S. culture and citizens. In his work, he was most focused on small-town people of the Midwest and South. From 1924 he traveled through these regions and made notes and sketches of everything he saw and experienced, which later became materials for his most outstanding pieces. Between the years of 1930 to 1936, he painted four mural programs: *America Today*, *The Arts of Life in America*, *A Social History of Indiana*, and *A Social History of Missouri*.<sup>30</sup> In 1930 *America Today* was displayed to the public at the New School for Social Research in New York. It was a collection of ten canvas panels that depict the period just before the Great Depression in several regions of the United States: New York, the West, the Midwest, and the South. The ten panels offer a look into the rural as well as the urban life at that time. There is presented the prosperity but also the impoverishment of the 1920s. One can see the pictures of moving trains with steam running up into the sky, showing the industrial power. Further, one can find burlesque dancers and flappers, which were so typical in the 1920s, symbolizing the culture of that time. His paintings also depicted “the underworld” of America, such as gangsters, alcoholics, the poor and homeless, etc. Many critics agreed that *America Today* “marked a revolution in American painting.”<sup>31</sup> However, a few years after his enormous success, he was marked as regressive and the enemy of modernism. He unwillingly antagonized the supporters of modernism and the advanced age. Also, conservative people were not fond of his vulgar way of displaying the less fortunate or the undesirable members of the American society and the historical realities which were not fully agreed on.<sup>32</sup>

In 1935 Benton left the great city of New York and left for the Midwest. There he freely renewed his career as a representative of Regionalism. Benton was proud of his Midwestern roots, and he incorporated it into his art as well. For example, his oil painting *The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley* from 1934 is inspired by a famous Missouri folk song, a tragic love ballad of the same name. Benton was familiar with the synchronism, as aforementioned, and even though the movement itself did not last for a very long time, his art was still influenced by music, which can be clearly seen in the mentioned painting. In the foreground, there are three musicians playing music and turning their backs on the man and woman behind them, which are supposed to represent the jealous lover and his fiancée acting

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<sup>30</sup> Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: Drawing from life* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>31</sup> Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: Drawing from life* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Adams, *Thomas Hart Benton: Discoveries and Interpretations* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2015), 63.

as the main characters of the song. The whole picture seems to be in motion, unstable. The hills in the background are rolling as if floating in the wind. This work is one of the many paintings whose inspiration was the mixture of the influence of music and the love for Benton's home, Missouri.

Other of Benton's artworks were so famous that they were sought by Hollywood producers who, like many others, appreciated his talent and wanted to use it in creating posters for movies. Twentieth Century Fox hired him to design a set of lithographs and other pieces for *The Grapes of Wrath*, a movie adaptation of an eponymous novel written by John Steinbeck. Benton created sixty-one illustrations in total. The company wanted to use Benton's oil painting, *The Departure of the Joads*, as a poster for this movie, making it into a billboard, magazine advertisement, movie posters, and movie lobby cards. The painting depicts a family loading a trunk in the countryside. They became victims of the horrible consequences of the Dust Bowl. They are leaving their home to seek a better life in California. In the background of the painting, there is a man, Grandfather Joad, who sits and ignores the rest of his family, preparing for the road, as he refuses to leave his home. Even though most of the painting is dark-themed and also the story behind it is heartbreaking, Benton did not use only dark colors. In the colored version of the picture, the sky is blue with almost no clouds covering the beautiful sunset, showing Benton's realistic approach to his creations. One can see that even though life might be miserable, the rest of the world keeps continuing to exist as if nothing is happening.

Most of Benton's paintings from the period of his stay in the Midwest region are based mainly on his personal observations. As mentioned above, Regionalism was about showing all of a region. That means capturing rich people as well as needy people, thriving areas, but also areas of the land which were dried out and not managed well enough to be worthy of being painted on canvas. Benton's art, as well as the art of other regionalists, brought attention to problems that all of America should be aware of.

However, the art of the 1930s, the so-called "Red Decade," was not met only with praise and appreciation but also with harsh criticism and disputes

### **5.7 The Reception and Criticism of the Art in the 1930s**

The period of the 1930s was extraordinary for many reasons. One of them being the fact that, in a way, the art merged with politics. The first step towards incorporating politics into art was the creation of several art programs of the New Deal. From then, artists were treated as

workers, and they also perceived themselves like this, which was a very new approach towards them. There was no longer “art for art’s sake,” which intended to separate art from all morals, religion, and especially politics. Art became political because it had an influence on the world through the creation of art as well as the exhibition, which were then available to all thanks to the New Deal. Due to the events of the Great Depression, many American artists but also ordinary citizens changed their idealized views, thoughts, and opinions and started to think more radically about their social experience.

The idea of the Social Realists’ leaned more towards the ideas and values of the political Left. Their art showed corrupt politicians, poverty, people living in the streets. The artists introduced America to Americans in a very raw, brutal, and perhaps unacceptable manner for many members of a more conservative lifestyle. For example, the aforementioned Thomas Hart Benton’s *America Today*, in which he actually celebrated the urban life. In his murals, he uplifted members of the society who used to be pushed aside, discriminated against, and even humiliated. Those were, for instance: African Americans, homeless people, Native Americans, common daily laborers etc. His art is considered to be vulgar, brutally honest, and direct. There is no wonder his art was viewed in such a way because Benton himself was considered to be an outspoken and rebellious artists. In his art, he truly imprinted himself, his personality, and his opinions. Speaking about criticism of art, Grant Wood was also criticized for his work of the Regionalist movement. The *American Gothic* was assumed by critics to be a satire of rural life, small-town lifestyle, farmers, and above all, the God-fearing conservatives. However, Grant himself refused such accusations, as mentioned above.

It is essential to acknowledge that these movements were not only criticized but also deeply appreciated. As mention above, some Regionalist artists wanted to go back in time. Back in time from the horrors of the Depression and also from the aftermaths of World War I. They longed to comfort the American citizens, to ease their issues by letting them appreciate the images of the American heartland, the Midwest region. The artists preserved the memory of beautiful, almost magical landscapes, giving people hope that better times are on their way.

Nevertheless, the artists of movements of Social Realism and Regionalism were not the only ones who were criticized. Another popular branch of art in the 1930s was documentary photography which revealed the actual consequences of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl because, at that time, there was no way of manipulating the pictures. Also, the photographers had no way of expressing their attitudes toward the ongoing situation. As mentioned, they only revealed and recorded the raw truth.

## **5.4 Documentary photography in the 1930s**

The invention of photography provided a realistic, genuine, and accurate representation of everything that is surrounding us: people, nature, buildings, or critical historical events. Both Regionalism and photography were prevalent in the 1930s, and they both captured life as it is. However, the difference is that Regionalism often brought hope and relief for the American people; however, photographs “were to carry a burden of truth that no other graphic medium possessed.”<sup>33</sup> Documentary photography was here to point up people’s attention to a situation that craved immediate help and remedial action. As previously mentioned, Roosevelt’s New Deal, especially the FSA, hired capable photographers to document and bring reports about the states and conditions the people and the land of America were in during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Each of the photographers had its own unique style, strategies, and ideas on how their photos should look like and what they should depict. Nevertheless, together as a group, they were supposed to create “a humanistic portrayal of social life.”<sup>34</sup> As the FSA photographs separated and traveled the most affected areas of the Dust Bowl, they thought they would find sick, hungry, suffering people begging for help, which of course they did. They found underfed children and many people who suffered from dust pneumonia caused by the constant inhalation of the dust floating around. However, many of them also met people who refused to give up on their lives and fought their current situation. Some of them even tried to live their lives as if nothing happened, cleaning their homes, managing their farms, speaking to their neighbors, and laughing together. The officials hoped to see the poverty and the horrible consequences of the Dust Bowl on broken Americans in order to provide them with jobs as a part of the New Deal. Instead, the FSA photographs showed undying hope, courage, optimism, and determination of people who were left with nothing but that.

The thesis will discuss the lives and works of two famous woman photographers of the FSA, Dorothea Lange and Marion Post Wolcott.

## **5.5 Dorothea Lange**

Dorothea Lange was probably the most influential and most prominent photographer of the 1930s, and her most impressive photographs originated in the Dust Bowl period. She was born on May 26, 1895, in Hoboken, New Jersey. She was born Dorothea Nutzhorn, but her parents divorced. Lange was so upset by her father, blaming him for the end of the marriage,

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<sup>33</sup> Miles Orvell, *American photography* (Oxford, New York: Oxford history of art, 2003), 61.

<sup>34</sup> Miles Orvell, *American photography* (Oxford, New York: Oxford history of art, 2003), 113.

she took her mother's maiden name. When she was seven years old, she got affected by poliomyelitis which left her with a partially paralyzed right leg, and it was noticeable it was weakened by the infectious disease. From a very young age, she was exposed to excellent education and creative art. She was not very interested in academic knowledge, and after she graduated from high school, she pursued photography. She studied photography at Columbia University, and in 1918 she was traveling the world earning her living by selling her photographs. However, eventually, she ran out of money, so she got employed in a photography shop in San Francisco, and later in her life, she opened her own studio.

Dorothea Lange first started to be interested in documentary photography in the 1920s when she and her husband Maynard Dixon traveled the Southwest, where Lange photographed Native Americans. However, with the strike of the Great Depression, she stayed at home in San Francisco and photographed her neighborhood. During the period of The Great Depression, Lange began photographing the homeless, unemployed people, and also refugees. Her famous photographs gave the public a look into the struggles of farmers, migrant workers, and others who found themselves at the bottom of society at that time. A simple look at her photographs made people feel empathic towards the suffering captured in Lange's photographs while offering them a more human outlook on the ongoing crisis. However, Orvell argues that photographers of the FSA were allowed to move the individuals and other things around them in order to get "the truthful image that looked unarranged."<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, there is no doubt that the photographs taken were showing the real struggles of people.

The government noticed Lange's images, and she became one of the photographers of the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Lange chronicled rural poverty across the USA and the FSA's efforts to provide relief to those affected by the crisis. "I have come to think of Lange as a photographer of democracy, and for democracy,"<sup>36</sup> says Linda Gordon in her book *Dorothea Lange: A life beyond limits*. According to Gordon, factors that influenced Lange's photographs, as well as Dorothea herself, went far beyond the events of the Great Depression. "From her family of origin, her two extraordinary husbands, and friends of great talent, she absorbed sensitivity, taste, and technique,"<sup>37</sup> Gordon continues. The crisis had an unquestionably immense effect on Lange's work; however, it is crucial to notice that it was not the only important factor. Her photographs opened a discussion for expanding and

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<sup>35</sup> Miles Orvell, *American photography* (Oxford, New York: Oxford history of art, 2003), 115.

<sup>36</sup> Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A life beyond limits* (United States: WW Norton & Co, 2010), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A life beyond limits* (United States: WW Norton & Co, 2010), 13.

deepening American democracy. She captured “the real face” of America in her images, showing that there is more than one nation in the U.S. Dorothea Lange captured a more democratic visual representation of the states. Gordon further explains her thoughts on Lange’s visual democracy.:

Lange’s America included Mormons, Jews and evangelicals; farmers, sharecroppers, and migrant farmworkers; workers domestic and industrial, male and female; citizens and immigrants not only black and white but also Mexican, Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese, notably the 120,000 Japanese Americans locked in internment camps during World War II.<sup>38</sup>

The Migrant Mother image is considered to be one of the most iconic photographs in American history. The picture was taken by Dorothea Lange, and it is probably the most known photograph from the period of the Great Depression. The image was taken on a pea pickers camp at Nipomo, California. It is an impersonation of a woman named Florence Owens Thompson. In the photograph, she is surrounded by her children. Dorothea Lange says:

I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her and seemed to know that my picture might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.<sup>39</sup>

After Lange’s photos were published in the San Francisco News, the United States government declared to send twenty thousand pounds of food to the pea picker’s camp, which has been mentioned above. Unfortunately, *the Migrant Mother*, Florence Thompson, was no longer staying there. Although she and her family moved away, she helped to bring attention to the living conditions and the suffering of people with related destinies, and by that, she relieved their misery at least a little bit. As Lange noted: “There was a sort of equality about it.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A life beyond limits* (United States: WW Norton & Co, 2010), 14.

<sup>39</sup> Liz Heron and Val Williams, *Illuminations: Women writing on photography from the 1850s to the present* (London, United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996), 152.

<sup>40</sup> Liz Heron and Val Williams, *Illuminations: Women writing on photography from the 1850s to the present* (London, United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996), 152.



The photograph symbolizes the hunger, poverty, and hopelessness of many American citizens during the Great Depression. “When Dorothea took that picture, it was the ultimate,”<sup>41</sup> Roy Emerson recalls on his cooperation with Lange. “To me, it was the picture of Farm Security. The others were marvelous, but that was special.”<sup>42</sup> The photograph was not taken under any exceptional circumstances, yet it had stayed in people’s minds since then.

## **5.6. Marion Post Wolcott**

Marion Post Wolcott was born in 1910 in Montclair, New Jersey. Her father, Walter Post, was a physician and his views on the world were very conservative. On the other hand, her mother, Marion Hoyt Post, a nurse, was a fierce supporter and activist for progressiveness and change. For instance, she worked with Margaret Sanger, who founded the American Birth Control League in 1921, later, in 1942, renamed Planned Parenthood, establishing birth control clinics around the whole country. Since the married couple’s values, Post Wolcott’s parents’, differed, they got divorced. Marion Post Wolcott and her older sister Helen Post were then sent to a boarding school in Greenwich, Connecticut. There, Post Wolcott explored her artistic needs and was an attendant of many theater performances and art exhibitions. She met with artists of various kinds; dancers, actors, musicians, and later on, she became a dancer herself, studying dance at The New School in New York and also in Paris. She used her money from babysitting and teaching in nursery school to pay for her tuition in New York. Speaking of her teaching experiences, she also studied early childhood education at the same school mentioned above, child psychology in Vienna. In the early 1930s, she moved to Massachusetts and became a teacher herself. There she first experienced the effects of the Great Depression and the class differences between her pupils. Paul Hendrickson, an author, journalist, and a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, says Post Wolcott struggled when seeing “the poison of class bigotries in America”<sup>43</sup> and added that “the experience will have much influence later on.”<sup>44</sup> When the school was closed, due to the crisis, she left for Europe to travel. Arriving in Berlin, she was a witness to one of the gatherings of the Nazis in the lead with Adolf Hitler. Post Wolcott commented on her terrifying experiences:

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<sup>41</sup> Roy Emerson Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In this proud land: America, 1935-1943, as seen in the FSA photographs* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Roy Emerson Stryker and Nancy Wood, *In this proud land: America, 1935-1943, as seen in the FSA photographs* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 19.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Hendrickson, “*Looking for the Light: The Hidden Life and Art of Marion Post Wolcott*” (New York: Knopf, 1992), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Hendrickson, “*Looking for the Light: The Hidden Life and Art of Marion Post Wolcott*” (New York: Knopf, 1992), 31.

I suppose this is why Nazism was so real to me. That experience, and what I saw when I got to Austria, made me very antifascist, as well as against all forms of racial intolerance for the rest of my life. So, I'd say first it was my mother, the crusading social worker, all her personal pain, that helped shape my leftist-liberal views. And then witnessing Hitler's rise to power. Those two experiences were profound to me.<sup>45</sup>

After leaving Berlin, she spent some time in France babysitting children, and then she stayed in Vienna, Austria, studying child psychology, as mentioned above. During her stay there, Post Wolcott was inspired by her sister Helen Post, who studied there as well, and her photography teacher Gertrude Fleischmann. Helen Post was a famous American photographer interested in capturing the life of the Navajo tribes in reservations. Post Wolcott tried and took some pictures and showed them to the teacher, who called her technique "photo-reporting,"<sup>46</sup> telling her: "Sis, I'm amazed at your eye. You should go on with this."<sup>47</sup> which was very convenient, concerning Post Wolcott's later works. Despite believing her actual occupation should be teaching or any other work with children, Post Wolcott bought her first camera on her way back to America, frightened of the rise of Nazism and fascism in Austria. Back in the United States, loving both teaching and photographing, she became a teacher at the Hessian Hills School at Croton-on-Hudson, New York, where she also got involved as a photographer of students' portraits, and she took photographs for school documents. In 1936 she became a freelance photographer and placed her photographs in some prestigious magazines, such as *The Survey Graphic* or *The Stage Magazine*. On top of that, one of her photographs accompanying an article titled *People of the Tennessee Valley* was published on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine*. The photograph was documenting people's living conditions in rural areas, and it showed a father with four children, looking out of a window of a cabin. She also joined the New York Photo League, an organization where the photographers document people's lives from the working-class, which still exists nowadays. There she met an important person, the aforementioned Roy Stryker, the head of the FSA program, and being impressed by the *People of the Tennessee Valley* photograph, he accepted her as a member of the program in 1938. More than that, she was the first woman who got full-time employment, unlike Dorothea Lange, who only worked for the FSA part-time.

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Hendrickson, *Looking for the Light: The Hidden Life and Art of Marion Post Wolcott* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 32.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Hendrickson, *Looking for the Light: The Hidden Life and Art of Marion Post Wolcott* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 34.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Hendrickson, *Looking for the Light: The Hidden Life and Art of Marion Post Wolcott* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 36.

Being part of the FSA, Post Wolcott traveled to and documented the South, specifically West Virginia, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, and North and South Carolina. From 1939 to 1941, she was dedicated to Florida in her work, giving the most extensive coverage of it out of all FSA photographers.<sup>48</sup> Like her colleagues, in her work, she focused on the poor and their horrible living conditions. However, she also documented inequalities between classes and races, being influenced by her experiences as a teacher in Massachusetts's small mill town and her encounter with the supporters of Nazism in Austria. The fact that Post Wolcott was firmly against racism or any other discrimination of other nations is notable from the way she was capturing them. There cannot be seen any difference between the whites and the blacks. The blacks were as much part of society as the whites. They were facing the same struggles and sorrows as the whites. In other words, one can say that there is nothing special about Post Wolcott's photographs. Yes, some of the African American citizens were facing discrimination, for example, in their workplace, but they were no outcasts. They were an integral part of the communities.

Apart from racism and horrible living conditions, Post Wolcott also wanted to show at least a bit of a positive side of the crisis by capturing some results of the government's involvement, some benefits of the New Deal program. In an interview for Smithsonian Institution in 1965, Post Wolcott says that at the beginning of her cooperation with the FSA program, her first assignments were very close to Washington, more specifically in West Virginia. She says: "I found the people not as apathetic as I had expected they might be. They weren't too beaten down. Of course, many of them were, but they were people with hope, and some of them still had a little drive, although, of course, their health was so bad it was telling."<sup>49</sup> Her observation can be confirmed by one of her photographs she took in West Virginia. It is called *Coal miner, his wife, and two of their children. Bertha Hill West Virginia, 1938*. In the picture there is, as the title of it says a husband and a wife of African American origin with their children, standing on the porch of their house. The husband holds one of his children in his arms while the other holds on to his mother's apron. After going through many of the other FSA photographs, one could see a considerable difference between those and this particular photograph. People captured in Post Wolcott's picture look genuinely happy. They are smiling despite the fact of

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<sup>48</sup> Robert E. Snyder, "Marion Post and the Farm Security Administration in Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 4 (April 1987): 4.

<sup>49</sup> "Oral history interview with Marion Post Wolcott, 1965 January 18," Archives of American Art, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-marion-post-wolcott-12262>.

their poverty or illness. There is hope reflecting in their faces. She managed to capture her love for people in her work as well as the territory she was photographing in. Roy Stryker described Post Wolcott's creations as the following: "And if you look through the file, you'll find Marion has a great sense of our land, of our terrain and a feeling of people on the land particularly, probably more than some of the others. A great love of people, great warmth and understanding of people."<sup>50</sup>

Marion Post Wolcott never fully fitted in the group of the FSA photographers because it was predominantly made up of men. Despite being dedicated and passionate about her work while also being praised for it, she never managed to reach her full potential. Roy Stryker never appreciated her work as much as the work of her male colleagues. However, she remembers her involvement with the FSA photographers and her work with a very warm heart: "Individually, I think we all believed that we were in some small way contributing to alleviating suffering, and possibly, hopefully, influencing government policy and programs for change."<sup>51</sup>

Dorothea Lange and Marion Post Wolcott were not colleagues, and they only met after Lange had ended her collaboration with the FSA. They both were reputable and well-recognized photographers who gave an insight into the reality of the life of ordinary people who were significantly affected by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Their photographs helped to shape the public reception of afflicted people and land.

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<sup>50</sup> "Oral history interview with Roy Emerson Stryker, 1963-1965," Archives of American Art, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-roy-emerson-stryker-12480>.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Hendrickson, *Looking for the Light: The Hidden Life and Art of Marion Post Wolcott* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 58.

## 6. Conclusion

The thesis analyzed the events of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl of the 1930s in the United States. In the beginning, the thesis is focused on a brief analysis of the causes of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. Further, the paper discusses in detail the New Deal and some of its administrations as the plan for ending the crisis or at least mitigate its consequences and as help the affected citizens.

After the prosperous time in the 1920s, almost nobody could have predicted what the following decade might bring upon the American citizens. The events of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl were devastating and fatal for many people, but Franklin D. Roosevelt's plan helped largely.

In the thesis, there is a significant focus on the art of the 1930s, so there is a particular emphasis put on the Federal Art Project and Farm Security Administration as essential parts of the New Deal. These projects were fundamental for supporting artists who lost their jobs due to the crisis. Not only were the programs helping the artists, but the support was mutual. The art of the 1930s represented America, some in a good way some in a bad way. However, there is no doubt that even today, some of the most outstanding artworks decorate the once empty walls of important buildings in America such as banks, post offices, or schools. Additionally, the artists awoke hope and a sense of patriotism in people's minds and souls. Furthermore, the Farm Security Administration was mainly designed to help the affected farmers, but it also made the urban people more aware of what the situation was like in rural areas.

The thesis covers Social realism and Regionalism as the most famous art movements. The artists such as Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton, who are covered in this thesis, are the two of many representatives of these movements. They created art which was representing reality no matter how hard it was for people to capture the truth.

In the following chapter, the bachelor thesis is dedicated to Grant Wood. He was accompanied by art since his school years and later used his skills while in the army in the period of World War I. As has been mentioned, he is one of the representatives of the Regionalist movement, which focused on a specific region, its land, people, customs, beauty, and ugliness. For Grant Wood, it was his home, Iowa, in the Midwestern region. He was inspired by his surroundings and is mainly recognized for two of his paintings. The first remarkable piece of his is called *Stone City, Iowa*, and the second piece is called the *American*

*Gothic*, which was misunderstood by many but later was recognized as a national symbol of America.

This chapter is followed by a part concerning the painter Thomas Hart Benton. He is also considered to be one of the representatives of Regionalism. However, he can also be included in the Social Realism movement. Unlike Grant Wood, he was not supported and encouraged to become an artist, and he was unwillingly sent to a military academy. However, after finishing his studies, there is kept on pursuing his desires and became an artist eventually. He became an educator in an art school where he inspired many young artists while focusing on his art, such as the famous murals of his *America Today*, which was also criticized by many, especially the conservative class of Americans. Due to the hostility of urban people and also his colleagues, Benton returned to the countryside. One can say that he was more interested in portraying the farmlands and colorful landscape of Missouri. His oil painting *The Ballad of the Jealous Lover of Lone Green Valley* from 1934 is a beautiful illustration of such landscape. Not only was he famous for his paintings, but he was also hired by the Twentieth Century Fox company to create a set of lithographs for a film called *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton are considered to be the most influential artists in America in the time of the Great Depression because they managed to introduce art to ordinary people. They showed not only the reality of the current world but also the beauty of memories and past times before the Great Depression and World War I. As mentioned, the reality of the crisis was not accepted by all, and seeing it portrayed in great exhibitions was not comprehensible for many people. The artists were called brutal, vulgar, or perhaps even liars for showing something so unacceptable.

This disapproval was all the more enlarged by the rise of documentary photography which is covered in the next chapter. Documentary photography provided even rougher insight into the events of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl because there was no manipulation behind the creating of a photograph, and all they depicted was the truth. The thesis discusses the lives and works of the two famous photographers of the FSA, Dorothea Lange, and Marion Post Wolcott.

Dorothea Lange studied photography, and later in her life, she owned a small photography studio herself. She had a small studio where she created people's portraits, but she perceived it as a standard service, not an art form. However, with the impending crisis, she desired to help outside of her studio and got part-time employment in the FSA as a photographer. Her

job was to document the consequences of the Dust Bowl and what damage it left on the farmers. She visited migrant camps mainly in California and captured the living conditions of migrants. Lange took many unforgettable photographs which will be connected to the crisis forever. However, the most famous she produced is the image of the *Migrant Mother* and her children. This photograph is remarkable, and it evokes feelings of empathy towards not only the family but towards all migrants.

The last chapter is focused on Marion Post Wolcott. Another representative of a women photographer employed by the FSA. One can say she was inspired by her mother, who felt deeply for people and their problems and refused any kind of discrimination. From the very beginning, Post Wolcott was interested in art but not photography in particular. She was encouraged by a well-known photographer Gertrude Fleischmann to embrace the skills and continue photographing because of her talent. Traveling to Europe, more specifically to Vienna, Austria, Post Wolcott recognized the horrors of the Nazism movement and was deeply disturbed by it, which later influenced her work as well. After meeting Roy Emerson Stryker, the head of the FSA, and got employed as the first woman photographer in the administration. Marion Post Wolcott tried to draw attention to not only the living conditions of people affected by the Dust Bowl but also to the racial issues between blacks and whites. She was praised for her great empathy and the ability to capture not only the fear and distress but also the hope and smiles of American citizens.

Thanks to a pervasive collection of paintings, illustrations, lithographs, and photographs, one can get a glimpse of what it was like living in America during the period of the greatest economic and agricultural crisis. History can be learned from books and the countless studies which have been written regarding this topic, but there is a lack of compassion towards the people who had to live through it, a lack of insight into their everyday lives, and sometimes a lack of understanding. Only by seeing the pictures, the real faces of real people, can one genuinely comprehend what horrors and tragedies the Great Depression brought upon American citizens.

## Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se věnuje problematice Velké hospodářské krize a prachových bouří ve 30. letech 20. století ve Spojených státech amerických. V úvodu je práce zaměřena na stručnou analýzu příčin Velké hospodářské krize a následných prachových bouří. Dále se práce zabývá podrobným rozborem Nového úředu nebo Nové dohody a některých z jeho správních plánů k ukončení krize nebo alespoň zmírnění jejích důsledků.

Po skončení 20. let, velmi prosperujících let, téměř nikdo nemohl předvídat, co následující desetileté přinese americkým občanům. Události Velké hospodářské krize a prachových bouří byly pro mnoho lidí zničující a fatální, ale plán prezidenta Franklina D. Roosevelta do značné míry pomohl tyto důsledky zmírnit.

V této práci je hlavní důraz kladen na umění 30. let, proto je zde obsažena analýza především na opatření jako je *The Federal Art Project* a *The Farm Security Administration* jako důležitou součástí Nové dohody. Tyto programy byly zásadní pro podporu umělců, kteří kvůli krizi přišli o práci. Nejen, že tyto programy pomáhaly umělcům, ale podpora byla vzájemná. Umění 30. let představovalo Ameriku, některé kusy v dobrém světle, jiné ve špatném. Není však pochyb o tom, že i dnes některá z největších uměleckých děl zdobí kdysi prázdné zdi důležitých budov ve Spojených státech, jako jsou například banky, pošty nebo školy. Umělci navíc vzbudili v myslích i duších lidí naději a pocit vlastenectví. *The Farm Security Administration* bylo ale hlavně navrženo pro pomoc zasaženým farmářům, ale také přinášelo informace o obyvatelích měst a vesnic o tom, jaká je tam situace.

V další části se práce zabývá nejrozšířenějšími uměleckými hnutími jako byly Sociální realismus a Regionalismus. Umělci jako Grant Wood a Thomas Hart Benton, kteří jsou v této práci zahrnuti, jsou jedni z mnoha představitelů těchto směrů. Jejich umění představovalo realitu bez ohledu na to, jak ošklivou.

V následující kapitole se práce věnuje samotnému Grantu Woodovi. Umění ho provázelo již od školních let a své dovednosti uplatnil i později, když narukoval do armády v období první světové války. Jak bylo zmíněno, Grant je jedním ze zástupců Regionalismu, což bylo hnutí, které se zaměřovalo na určitý region, lidi, zvyky na to krásné i ošklivé. Pro Granta Wooda to byl jeho domov, Iowa. Byl inspirován svým okolím a je nejvíce uznávaný za své dva obrazy *Stone City, Iowa* a *American Gothic*. *American Gothic* byla malba, která byla mnohými odsuzovaná a kritizovaná, ale později se stala národním symbolem Ameriky.



Tato kapitola je následována částí o Thomasi Hartu Bentonovi, který je také považován za jednoho z představitelů Regionalismu, lze ho však také zahrnout do hnutí Sociálního realismu. Na rozdíl od Wooda nebyl podporován a povzbuzován k tomu, aby se stal umělcem, a tak byl proti své vůli poslán na vojenskou akademii. Po ukončení studia však pokračoval v prosazování svých tužeb, a nakonec se umělcem opravdu stal. Působil jako pedagog na umělecké škole, kde mohl dále inspirovat mladší generace umělců a také se zaměřil na jeho osobní tvorbu. *America Today* je název jeho slavných nástěnných maleb, které byly kritizovány zejména konzervativní částí obyvatel Ameriky. Protože si tímto výtvořem zneprátelil i mnohé kolegy umělce, Benton se vrátil na venkov, kde se více zajímal o malbu krajiny jeho domova v Missouri. Jeho olejomalba *The Ballad of the Jealous Lover and Lone Green Valley* z roku 1934 je krásnou ilustrací této krajiny. Nejenže se Benton proslavil svými malbami, ale byl také najat společností *Twentieth Century Fox*, aby vytvořil kolekci litografií pro film s názvem *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Grant Wood a Thomas Hart Benton jsou považováni za nejvíce vlivné umělce Ameriky v době Velké hospodářské krize, protože dokázali své umění přiblížit obyčejným lidem a skvěle dokázali zobrazit realitu i krásy minulých dob ještě před krizí a první světovou válkou. Jak již bylo zmíněno, realita krize nebyla přijata všemi a její zobrazení na velkých uměleckých výstavách nebo pro mnoho lidí v pořádku. Umělci byli označováni slovy jako je brutalita, vulgárnost nebo byli dokonce považováni za lháře.

Tento nesouhlas byl by ještě více rozšířen se vzestupem dokumentární fotografie, které se věnuje další kapitola. Dokumentární fotografie poskytla ještě drsnější pohled na události Velké deprese a prachových bouří, protože s fotografiemi se v té době nedalo nijak manipulovat, takže to, co zobrazovaly byla krutá pravda. Práce dále pojednává o životě a díle dvou známých fotografek Dorothee Langové a Marion Post Wolcottové.

Dorothea Lange, studovala fotografii a později ve svém životě dokonce i sama vlastnila malé studio. S blížící se krizí si přála pomáhat venku mimo své studio a později získala práci na částečný úvazek ve FSA jako fotografka. Jejím úkolem bylo dokumentovat škody a důsledky prachových bouří, které za sebou zanechaly. Navštěvovala migrační tábory převážně v Kalifornii a zachycovala tam životní podmínky migrantů. Langová pořídila mnoho nezapomenutelných fotografií, které budou navždy spojeny s krizí. Avšak nejslavnější z nich je *Migrant mother* a jejích dětí. Tato fotografie je pozoruhodná a vyvolává pocity empatie nejen vůči této rodině, ale ke všem migrantům

Poslední kapitola se zabývá fotografkou Marion Post Wolcottovou, která byla také zaměstnaná u FSA. Můžeme říci, že její tvorba byla inspirována její matkou, která hluboce odmítala jakoukoli diskriminaci kohokoliv. Již od útlého dětství se Wolcottová zajímala o umění, ale ne o fotografii. K dráze fotografky ji povzbuzovala známá fotografka Getruda Fleischmannová, která jí tlačila k tomu, aby přijala své dovednosti a pokračovala ve fotografování, protože podle ní byla Wolcottová velice talentovaná. Při cestě do Evropy, konkrétněji do rakouské Vídně, poznala Wolcottová hrůzy nacistického hnutí a byla jim hluboce znepokojená, což také později ovlivnilo její práci. Po setkání s Royem Emersonem Strykerem, šéfem FSA, se nechala na plný úvazek zaměstnat jako první žena v této správě. Marion Post Wolcottová se snažila upozornit nejen na životní podmínky lidí postižených prachovými bouřemi, ale také poukazovala na rasové problémy mezi černochoy a bělochoy. Byla ceněna pro svou empatii a schopnosti zachytit nejen strach a utrpení, ale také naději a úsměvy na rtech amerických občanů.

Díky velmi rozsáhlé sbírce obrazů, ilustrací, litografií a fotografií lze nahlédnout do toho, jaké bylo živobytí v Americe v době největší hospodářské a zemědělské krize. Historie se dá naučit z knih a z nesčetného počtu studií, které byly k tomuto tématu napsány, ale tyto prameny nám neposkytnou možnost soucítit s lidmi, kteří si těmito událostmi prošli, je v nich nedostatek vhledu do jejich každodenního života a někdy i nedostatek porozumění. Pouze při pohledu na obrazy a fotografie a na skutečné tváře skutečných lidí lze skutečně pochopit, jaké hrůzy a tragédie způsobila Velká hospodářská krize americkým občanům.

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