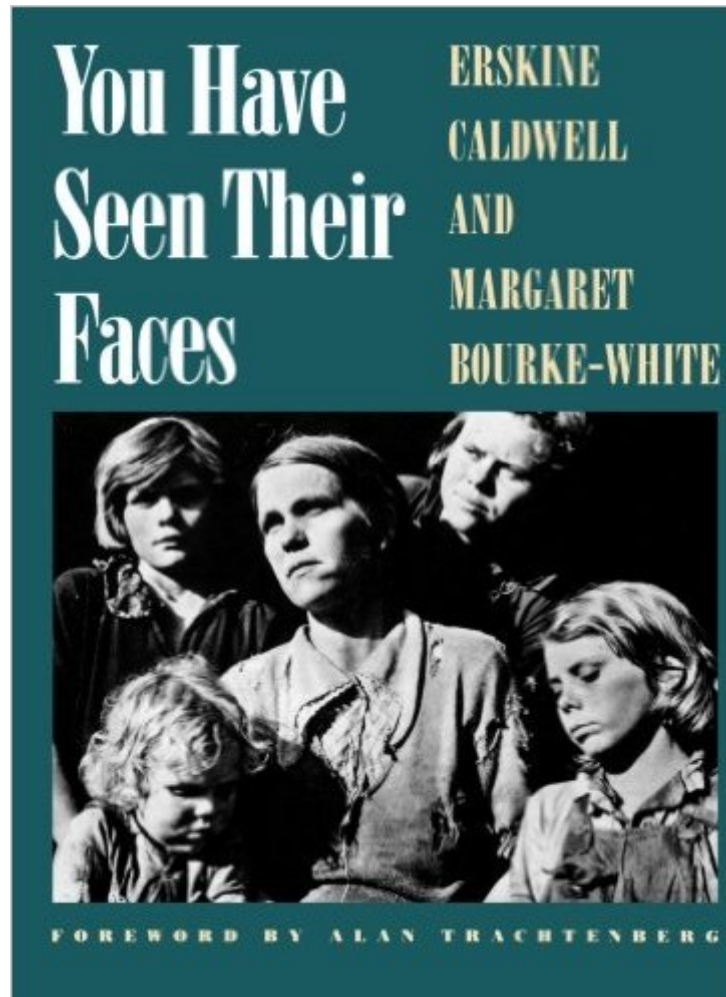


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# You Have Seen Their Faces (Brown Thrasher Books Ser.)



## Synopsis

In the middle years of the Great Depression, Erskine Caldwell and photographer Margaret Bourke-White spent eighteen months traveling across the back roads of the Deep South •from South Carolina to Arkansasâ •to document the living conditions of the sharecropper. Their collaboration resulted in *You Have Seen Their Faces*, a graphic portrayal of America's desperately poor rural underclass. First published in 1937, it is a classic comparable to Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*, and James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which it preceded by more than three years. Caldwell lets the poor speak for themselves. Supported by his commentary, they tell how the tenant system exploited whites and blacks alike and fostered animosity between them. Bourke-White, who sometimes waited hours for the right moment, captures her subjects in the shacks where they lived, the depleted fields where they plowed, and the churches where they worshipped.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Just read this book for the first time. I am a 42 year old woman from South Carolina who has been researching her family tree for several years now. I knew that my paternal grandfather's family was extremely poor and that they "worked other people's land" Someone once described their existence as being similar to the family Caldwell wrote about in *Tobacco Road*. This book is beautifully written and predicted the civil rights movement thirty years before it happened. A very good book for

someone interested in learning about the history of poverty in the South and how it affected not just the Black population but the impoverished whites as well. It eloquently explains how poverty and ignorance bred anger and unrest between the poor whites and the poor blacks of the post civil war depression era south. The photographs are beautiful and stunning. I think it should be a required book for the average high school student studying the history of the deep south and all of it's issues of the early to mid twentieth century. Amazing that it was written in the mid 1930's and you can still see and almost feel the pain of hunger and absolute poverty in the faces and eyes of the people photographed and hear the sadness and hopelessness in their voices.

In the early years of the Great Depression, author Erskine Caldwell and photographer Margaret Bourke-White spent 18 months in the American Southern states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee interviewing and photographing tenant farmers, commonly known as sharecroppers. This book, published in 1935 is the result of their work. Caldwell wrote about sharecroppers barely scraping a living from land drained of all fertility, the landlords who kept 10 million Southerners in economic slavery to produce cotton, and the politicians and ministers who supported the system rather than reform it. While he interviewed, Bourke-White sat quietly with camera ready to photograph them. It includes 75 mostly, full-page pictures taken by her that portray the destitute life of the tenant farming families. This is an amazing depiction of Southern poverty in words and pictures that I found very moving in spite of its age.

The text is well written (but you must read the introduction.) The photos look like they could be great, but the quality is horrible as some reviewers have mentioned. I wonder if the people who have mentioned such beautiful pictures in their reviews saw a different edition than this University of Georgia Press paperback. The print quality makes me sad, especially since I'm from Georgia.

Mine is the 75-cent version, 1937, found at a library book sale. I paid \$.50 and whenever I pick it up to look through it again, am surprised at my bargain: Bourke-White's photos cum captions get into your head, stay there; the text, Caldwell as Caldwell. It is a slice of our Southern history - black and white - all ages - poverty is the equalizer here, taking prisoners and spitting them out. A photo of a white kid grinning because he is going fishing, showing his teeth, so badly misshapen; yet, at the moment of that photo, the best he will have for the rest of his life. Black women lining up for the \$4/month government "old age pension," being grateful for the "helping hand for the colored people." Stunning, amazing, searing. Cannot imagine why my copy was given away as I surely will

not ever be doing that.

Historical text is valuable reading, however the photographs are nearly invisible because they are printed on the poorest quality paper imaginable, similar to newsprint. Unfortunate because the photographs by Margaret Bourke-White are among the best of its genre.

Having experienced some of the tenant problems, this book gives an accurate account of how it was for Black and White share croppers/farmers. A few Land owners were very fair with their tenants, however, the majority were only in it for the profit. Life was unpleasant for the tenant(s).

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