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The Story of a Photograph: Walker Evans, Ellie Mae Burroughs, and the Great Depression (Kindle Singles)

Jerry L. Thompson

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Walker Evans's iconic photograph of Ellie Mae Burroughs of Hale County, Alabama, made while he was working with James Agee, has become a memorable symbol of the Great Depression. How it came to be, and what consequences it provoked, make for a fascinating tale.

Although the Great Depression brought suffering to the cities in equal measure, the images of rural poverty and despair remain the more searing memories of the worst economic collapse in American history. This is largely due to the small band of photographers who recorded the miseries of the poor, under the auspices of the New Deal's Farm Security Administration. Notable among them were Margaret Bourke-White, Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, and Walker Evans. The story that Jerry Thompson tells here is of Evans's iconic photograph of Ellie Mae Burroughs of Hale County, Alabama. Evans made it while working with James Agee on assignment from Fortune magazine. It is not only a great picture technically but has become a memorable symbol of difficult times.

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Jerry L. Thompson is a working photographer who occasionally writes about photography. During the last three years of Walker Evans's life he was Evans's principal assistant and, for a time, printer of photographs. He lived with Evans off and on from late 1972 until Evans's death in April 1975. From 1973 until 1980 he was a member of the faculty of Yale University. Thompson has also written The Last Years of Walker Evans; a book of essays, Truth and Photography; and the introduction to Walker Evans at Work. He lives in Amenia, New York.

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