

The book was found

# The Americans



## Synopsis

First published in France in 1958, then in the United States in 1959, Robert Frank's *The Americans* changed the course of twentieth-century photography. In 83 photographs, Frank looked beneath the surface of American life to reveal a people plagued by racism, ill-served by their politicians and rendered numb by a rapidly expanding culture of consumption. Yet he also found novel areas of beauty in simple, overlooked corners of American life. And it was not just Frank's subject matter--cars, jukeboxes and even the road itself--that redefined the icons of America; it was also his seemingly intuitive, immediate, off-kilter style, as well as his method of brilliantly linking his photographs together thematically, conceptually, formally and linguistically, that made *The Americans* so innovative. More of an ode or a poem than a literal document, the book is as powerful and provocative today as it was 56 years ago.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Armed with a camera and a fresh cache of film and bankrolled by a Guggenheim Foundation grant, Robert Frank crisscrossed the United States during 1955 and 1956. The photographs he brought back form a portrait of the country at the time and hint at its future. He saw the hope of the future in the faces of a couple at city hall in Reno, Nevada, and the despair of the present in a grimy roofscape. He saw the roiling racial tension, glamour, and beauty, and, perhaps because Frank himself was on the road, he was particularly attuned to Americans' love for cars. Funeral-goers lean against a shiny sedan, lovers kiss on a beach blanket in front of their parked car, young boys perch

in the back seat at a drive-in movie. A sports car under a drop cloth is framed by two California palm trees; on the next page, a blanket is draped over a car accident victim's body in Arizona. Robert Frank's Americans reappear 40 years after they were initially published in this exquisite volume by Scalo. Each photograph (there are more than 80 of them) stands alone on a page, while the caption information is included at the back of the book, allowing viewers an unfettered look at the images. Jack Kerouac's original introduction, commissioned when the photographer showed the writer his work while sitting on a sidewalk one night outside of a party, provides the only accompanying text. Kerouac's words add narrative dimension to Frank's imagery while in turn the photographs themselves perfectly illustrate the writer's own work. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this 50th anniversary reissue, celebrated photographer Frank maintains the format (left page: brief caption, right page: photo) and introduction (Jack Kerouac: "with the agility, mystery, genius, sadness and strange secrecy of a shadow Frank photographed scenes that have never been seen before on film"), the images themselves have been re-scanned, re-cropped by Frank and, in two cases, changed. Frank's images, taken all across the country, leave the viewer with a solemn impression of American life. From funerals to drug store cafeterias to parks, Frank recorded every shade of everyday life he encountered: the lower and upper classes, the living and dead, the hopeful and destitute, all the while experimenting with angle, focus and grain to increase impact. Preceding an exhibition that will tour U.S. galleries in 2009, this volume will no doubt introduce new generations to Frank's inimitable record of daily life fifty years ago. Kerouac says, fittingly, that "after seeing these pictures you end up finally not knowing any more whether a jukebox is sadder than a coffin

I have not found a more enthralling and inspiring photo essay style book than Robert Frank's "The Americans". Truly a "paper movie", "the Americans" is an amazing book of substantial depth and quality. For the photographer and for those who love the craft of photography, this volume is a must. This should be the foundation of any photographic library. Spoil yourself and get this book.

I was expecting more. Better print quality and a bigger book. The book is smaller than an 8x10. I guess the quality is good for the price of the book. The photos themselves are excellent. The cover photo is probably the strongest of these. Not many street photographers can do what the old masters did. Which is get up close and make you feel that you're right there. One reviewer kinda

dismissed Frank's work, even going as far as calling it bigotry and biased. Of course it's biased. All photography is. Photography is the photographer's interpretation. Then you have to take into consideration the publisher's selects as well.

In this new edition of THE AMERICANS, the publisher, Steidl seems to have taken every step necessary to maintain artistic integrity of Franks vision. Even going as far as having Frank supervise the new printing of the photographs used in the book. The paper used in the book is very high quality, perhaps even 'archival' grade. Of course, there is the Kerouac introduction that both rambles, amuses and enlightens. There is a small pamphlet included in the book briefly telling the background story of how this new edition came to life. While this pamphlet is basically an advertisement, it also provides the passing fan of Robert Frank with a greater knowledge of what Frank has done over the course of his life by listing other books and movies that Stiedl will be publishing in the future. Thoughtfully, museum dates are also given for those interested enough to travel to D.C., SF or, NYC for the 50th anniversary celebration and exhibition of the book. From Steidl, this is a fine book; from Frank, a work of art; and a labor of love from all involved.

A fantastic book. Was looking for a book to spark and inspire my skill set and found it in "The Americans". Classic shots and all black and white pictures. This collection was assembled in the "old days" and what great shots, before the thought process of snap a few hundred and something will be good. The were from the days when every shutter click cost money and you wanted to get everything right. Great motivator and a must have for the up and coming photographer.

If you want to understand the USA of today, 2009, there's no better time and place to start than with America in the mid 1950s, when the "post-war-cold-war-post-cold-war" culture first took shape, at the threshold of: rock and roll and youth culture; clvil rights, the end of Jim Crow, 'crossover' culture; global immigration, the culture of diversity; college as a normal expectation for lower-middle class kids; the Beat Generation, Hippies, the turn-on-drop-out culture; two kids, two income families, two cars in every garage, and above all a TV in every home. You'd have been quite a prophet if you'd foreseen 'what we are today' on the basis of 'what we were in 1950,' but the seeds were there.If you want to 'see' the 1950s, you can do it. You don't need a time-machine. The 85 photographs in this famous collection, taken 'on the road' by the German-Swiss Robert Frank, are worth at least 85,000 words. All in black-and-white, eclectic and experimental in darkroom technology, almost none of them of 'famous' people or familiar sights, these carefully and thoughtfully sequenced photographs

reveal more of the shadows upon the American Dream than the sparkling spot lights, but they are as uncompromisingly honest as a dental X-ray. Not a speck of caries can be hidden. Frank saw through the superficial smiles of the 1950s to the cavities of core city and rural poverty, racism, sexism, crassness, and forced conformity - the grotesque 1950s that Flannery O'Connor depicted in *Wise Blood* and other works, that James Dean and Marlon Brando portrayed in films, and that Jack Kerouac tried to flee by taking to "the road." If you want to understand Kerouac - or the appeal of Kerouac to a generation of young Americans - you couldn't do better than spend some hours looking at these photos of the culture he fled from. And in fact, Kerouac himself played a role in getting Frank's work recognized and published. The introduction to the first edition of *The Americans* is possibly Kerouac's most intelligent and coherent piece of social analysis, almost a manifesto of dissatisfaction with the stifling mediocrity of his contemporary USA. Robert Frank was above all a photographer. A camera artist. The compositional and technical innovations that he achieved in this and other thematic collections of photos nudged the aesthetic of photography in directions that are still evident even in commercials during football games or in fashion shots for auto ads. The huge touring exhibit of his work, now on display at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, has reminded me of his powerful impact both as a visual artist and as a social commentator. Don't miss it if you have a chance!

I didn't understand *The Americans* when it first came out, but I was young then. All these years later, after a career in photography and publishing, I begin to understand it and appreciate just how much Frank did. I don't know that Robert Frank invented photography as we know it today, but if not he certainly gave it a big push forward. As Jack Kerouac said in his introduction: "Anybody doesn't like these pitchers don't like poetry, see? Anybody don't like poetry go home see Television shots of big hatted cowboys being tolerated by kind horses." Anyone interested in photography, either the practice or the art, should spend some time with this book. Otherwise just go watch TV. Aside from the content, this edition is a very well made book, very nicely printed and bound. A joy to handle and look at.

This book has a place of influence in the history of photography, especially street/straight/American photography. As you 'read' it, pay attention to the context of each photo and the order they are in in relation to each other. It's almost like a movie made up of still photographs. You find new meaning each time you flip through.

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