



Student Name:
Class Period:
Date:

Meet the Originals

Texas Originals is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on Russell Lee. Then, answer questions about it.

Russell Lee **1903–1986**

Russell Lee was one of the most acclaimed American photographers of the twentieth century. Born in Illinois in 1903, he lived half of his life in the Midwest, San Francisco, and New York, before finally settling in Austin.

Dissatisfied with a career in chemical engineering, Lee turned to painting, and then photography. He developed his distinctive style while documenting the effects of the Great Depression on rural communities for the Farm Security Administration. Lee's iconic images of ordinary Americans in extraordinary circumstances helped inspire the form now known as documentary photography.

By the time Lee settled in Austin, in 1947, his reputation as a photographer was well established. From his base in Texas, he continued to travel the world, recording subjects that ranged from the oil fields of Saudi Arabia to life in the distinct regions of Italy.

Lee also trained his lens on Texas. He photographed Spanish-speaking communities across the state and the political campaigns of Ralph Yarborough and Allan Shivers. Lee helped establish the photography program in the art department at The University of Texas, where he taught until his retirement.

Lee died in 1986, leaving a body of work that reveals the truth and dignity of his subjects. As one curator noted, "His essential compassion for the human condition shines forth in every image."

Check for Understanding: Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on Russell Lee. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. When did Russell Lee develop his distinctive style of photography?
2. What Texas subjects did Lee capture with his photography?

Going Further: Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Making Inferences.** How do you think photography affects our understanding of historical events?