



## Photographing Farmworkers in California

Richard Street

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As exploited and colonized people, California farmworkers have attracted such massive, overwhelming photographic scrutiny that today their story cannot be told, studied, or understood without engaging the photographic dimension. Although the work of Dorothea Lange and other photographers from the 1930s often comes to mind, virtually every photographer of consequence at some time, for some reason, photographed in the fields of the Golden State. This includes such unlikely twentieth-century artists as fashion photographer Richard Avedon and commercial photographer Max Yavno, along with the nineteenthcentury masters Carleton E. Watkins and Eadweard Muybridge. Their work, however, does not unfold along neat, predictable lines. While it has both obscured the place of field hands in modern agriculture and made a case against the farm labor system as an instrument of poverty and oppression, the best of these photographs goes far beyond advertising and exposé, cutting through layers of ignorance and indifference and raising difficult moral questions that force us to reflect on the extent to which, as a society, we require the subservience of an entire class of people. This volume presents 282 of these important photographs.



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