

12 Million Black Voices: Richard Wright, Edwin Roskam, and the Golden Age of Documentary Photography Books

Lecture by Gary Saretzky

Abstract

12 Million Black Voices, first published in 1941, combines best-selling author Richard Wright's poetic history of African Americans with ninety photographs made for a federal agency, the Farm Security Administration (FSA), during the Great Depression. The book was edited by Edwin Roskam, an FSA editor and photographer who did a series of documentary photography books about American life. The photographs are by Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, Russell Lee, Ben Shahn, and others who have become renowned. The images depict both rural poverty and urban life in northern ghettos.

Speaker

Gary D. Saretzky, archivist, educator, and photographer, worked as an archivist for more than fifty years at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Educational Testing Service, and the Monmouth County Archives. Saretzky taught the history of photography at Mercer County Community College, 1977-2012, and served as coordinator of the Public History Internship Program for the Rutgers University History Department, 1994-2016. He has published more than 100 articles and reviews on the history of photography, photographic conservation, and other topics, including "Exceptional Cameraworkers: Early Black Photographers in New Jersey," published in *New Jersey Studies*, the online journal. Saretzky's website at <http://saretzky.com> includes his lecture schedule and other photography-related resources.