



Erskine Caldwell, Margaret Bourke-White, and the Popular Front: Photojournalism in Russia

Jay Caldwell

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Erskine Caldwell's novels *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933) made the author a popular and critically acclaimed chronicler of the South but also a controversial one, due to his work's political themes and depictions of sexuality. Margaret Bourke-White, fresh from her role as staff photographer for *Fortune*, became the first female photojournalist for *LIFE* in 1936, and her iconic images graced its covers and helped solidify the magazine as a preeminent visual periodical.

When Caldwell and Bourke-White married in 1939, they were both celebrities, popular and provocative in equal measures because of their leftist politics and their questioning of American cultural norms. They collaborated on the photodocumentary books *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937), *North of the Danube* (1939), and *Say, Is This the U.S.A.* (1941). In the summer of 1941, the couple entered Russia on assignment and were there when the Germans invaded on June 22. As a result, Caldwell and Bourke-White were the first Americans to report on the Russian war front by broadcast radio and continued to transmit almost daily newspaper articles about the Russian reaction to the war. Their international celebrity and their clout within the Soviet literary establishment provided them remarkable access to people and places during their five-month stay. Their final collaboration, *Russia at War* (1942), is a culmination of their work during that time.

Erskine Caldwell, Margaret Bourke-White, and the Popular Front traces and analyzes the couple's collaborations, the adventures that led to them, the evolving political stances that informed them, and the aftereffects and influences of their work on their careers and those of others. Both biographically revealing and analytically astute, author Jay Caldwell offers a profound, new perspective on two of America's most renowned midcentury artists at the peaks of their careers.

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