

The Impact of the Great Depression  
Towards the Rights and Responsibilities of Migrant Workers

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Individual Documentary

Process Paper: 492

## Process Paper

In trying to determine a suitable topic for my research, I considered looking through my grandfather's old history books to get ideas. While looking through a stack of books, I found *The Grapes of Wrath*, a novel of historical fiction that takes place during the Great Depression. After reading the book's depiction of migrant farmworkers and the harsh exploitation they faced, I knew that I could tie in "rights and responsibilities" with this profound yet compelling subject. I was sure that this was an interesting topic to pursue for my History Fair project.

I began my research with an examination of available online resources by consulting the internet about the events of the Great Depression. To gather more extensive resources, I browsed through the Library of Congress Internet Archive. I stumbled across the Voices from the Dust Bowl: the Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, an internet archive collection containing an abundance of primary sources such as: songs, interviews, audio recordings, diaries, pictures, manuscripts, and other records collected at federal migrant camps; this collection would function as the backbone of most of my research. I conducted two interviews with former migrant workers from Texas, Micaela Rodriguez and Esther Ramirez; their insights provided me great knowledge of their daily responsibilities and the mistreatment and abuse they endured. I managed to contact the Attorney at Law Branch Manager from the Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, Israel Reyna, to gain a different perspective. He provided me with a great deal of information about the laws and rights correlated with migrant workers. Lastly, I interviewed Amy Castely, a professor of civil law at St. Mary's University. She gave me detailed information about migrant workers laws, especially about the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Protection Act of 1975.

After gathering my resources, I brainstormed about which presentation category would be best to deliver my research. I settled on the documentary category because of my personal interest in video editing. I assembled my gathered documents and information, and then began piecing together the story of the migrant workers. I wrote a brief outline which became a script. I recorded it in Audacity and brought it together with my media in Windows Live Movie Maker. As I continued my research, I struggled between modifying the script and modifying the visual until I was satisfied. At first, my documentary exceeded the 10 minute limit, so I made some hard decisions and shortened some interviews and eliminated pictures.

My documentary connects to the theme because it significantly portrays the history of the plight of migrant workers. It expresses the history of the persistent exploitation of migrant farmer workers and their families. With no rights or laws to protect them from mistreatment, they were forced to accept demanding labor which brought hardship and agony. They were entitled to basic human rights but farm owners exploited the migrant workers and took no responsibility for their basic rights and humanity.

# Annotated Bibliography

## **Primary Sources**

### **Rodriquez, Micaela. Telephone interview. 11 Nov. 2013.**

Micaela Rodriquez was a migrant farmworker during the 1940's. She shared her harsh experiences and stories with me. I recorded the phone call with her permission and used a section of this interview in my documentary.

### **Esther Ramirez. Personal interview. 14 Dec. 2013.**

Esther Ramirez was a migrant farmworker who endure the exploitation on the cotton fields. She told me what she was responsible to do as a worker, as well as the conditions of where she lived. I included a section of this interview in my documentary.

### **Reyna, Israel. Personal interview. 28 Feb. 2014.**

Israel Reyna is the Attorney at Law Branch Manager at the Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid office in Laredo. He is a civil law lawyer and has been involved in numerous farmworker cases. He provided me with a great deal of information about the laws and rights correlated with migrant workers; such as the California's National Labor Relations Act and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act. I included a section of this interview in my documentary.

### **Castely, Amy. Personal interview. 3 Mar. 2014.**

Amy Castely is a professor of Civil Law at St. Mary's University in San Antonio. She was able to give me detailed information about laws that were passed that made the conditions better for migrant workers. I included a section of this interview in my documentary.

**Mullins, Lillie. Interview. *Surviving the Dust Bowl*. PBS. 1998. Television.**

In *Surviving the Dust Bowl*, Lillie Mullins, an Arkansas share cropper, was interviewed about her experience on the cotton fields. I used this clip in my documentary. Also I was able to gain more information about the events of the Dust Bowl.

**Todd, Charles, and Robert Sonkin. "Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection, 1940-1941." *Voices from the Dust Bowl*. Library of Congress, 8 Jan. 1998. Web. 15 Nov. 2013.**

The Voices from the Dust Bowl internet archive collection contains an abundance of primary sources such as: songs, interviews, audio recordings, diaries, pictures, manuscripts, and other records collected at federal migrant camps. These numerous assorted documents and audio recordings contributed a better understanding of what happen at migrant farm camps.

***Sights and Sounds of the Farm Security Administration*. Dir. Cara De Vito. Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, 2006. DVD.**

After viewing the *Sights and Sounds of the Farm Security Administration*, I attained more knowledge of the Farm Security Administration camps. Most importantly, it provided me with countless visuals for my documentary.

**"This Great Nation Will Endure." *Curriculum Guide on the Great Depression*. National Archives, n.d. Web. 15 Nov. 2013.**

**<<http://www.archives.gov/atlanta/education/depression-curriculum/>>.**

On this webpage, I found documents that had history of the Farm Security Administration along with some pictures of migrant workers.

**"Frances Perkins Speech 1940." YouTube. YouTube, 08 Mar. 2012. Web. 19 Dec. 2013.**

**<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLNrBgKWiLw>>.**

I used this YouTube video clip of Frances Perkin's public address in 1940. She talked about shortening work hours and establishing minimum wage for workers who are employed in all industries.

***Inaugural Address: Franklin D. Roosevelt Video. History.com. A&E Television Networks, n.d. Web. 19 Dec. 2013. <<http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/franklin-d-roosevelt/videos/inaugural-address-franklin-d-roosevelt>>.***

I used this clip of Franklin Roosevelt's Inaugural Address on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1933. He said in his speech that the United States would recover from the Great Depression.

**Darnton, Byron. "Miss Perkins Asks Migrant Security." *The New York Times* 7 May 1940: 11. Print.**

This newspaper article states information about Frances Perkins, the Secretary of Labor, who fought for migrant worker rights before the Congress in 1940. It also provided me with a picture to go along with my documentary as I talk about Frances Perkins.

**"Seven Cent Cotton and Forty Cent Meat." Pete Seeger, 1930. MP3.**

I used this song in my documentary to describe how migrant workers would not earn enough of money picking cotton.

## Secondary Sources

**Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Viking, 1939. Print.**

The author, John Steinbeck, wrote about the Dust Bowl migration to California in the mid 1930's and greatly depicted the hardships the migrant workers suffered at the Weed Patch Camp. Although the historical fiction novel was based around fictional characters, the Joads, the whole story was historically accurate. It provided me with insights of the daily lives of migrant farmworkers.

**Smith, Sharon. "The 1930s: Turning Point for U.S. Labor." *International Socialist Review*. Center for Economic Research and Social Change, Sept.-Oct. 2012.**

This magazine article contained information about the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and how it affected the economy. It also showed statistics of how many people were unemployed shortly after the crash.

**Partridge, Elizabeth, and Dorothea Lange. *Restless Spirit: The Life and Work of Dorothea Lange*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Viking, 1998. Print.**

This book contained the history of Dorothea Lange's life as a photographer during the Great Depression. She worked for the Farm Security Administration and witnessed the hardships migrant workers faced at labor camps.

**Thompson, E. L. *Cesar Chavez, with Profiles of Terence V. Powderly and Dolores Huerta*. Chicago, IL: World Book, 2007. Print.**

In this book, I gathered information about Cesar Chavez's life and his contributions towards migrant workers. I utilized the information about Chavez's grape boycott which resulting in the Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

***New York: A Documentary Film*. Dir. Ric Burns. PBS, 1999. DVD.**

I found clips and pictures of the stock market crash of 1929 and the events that took place at Wall Street. I also gained more insights of the stock market crash.

**"River Flows in You." Yiruma, 2001. MP3.**

This piano instrumental was used in my documentary.

**"Where is my mind." Maxence Cyrin, 2009. MP3.**

This piano instrumental was inserted into my documentary.

**"Solitude." David Nevue, 1995. MP3.**

This instrumental piece was placed into my documentary.