

Life in the Depression Source Analysis

Migrant Mother Document Analysis

Document A:

1. What are the strengths and limitations of Lange's photograph as evidence of the conditions facing migrant workers in California at the time? Explain.

Document B:

2. How does this document affect your understanding of "Migrant Mother" as evidence of what living conditions were like for migrants in California during the Depression?

Document C-F:

3. How do these photographs affect your understanding of the "Migrant Mother" photograph or how it was taken?
4. Do these photographs affect your understanding of Lange's "Migrant Mother" as evidence of the past? Explain.

Document G:

5. How does this photograph affect your understanding of the "Migrant Mother" photograph or how it was taken?
6. Does this photograph affect whether you think Lange's "Migrant Mother" photograph is strong evidence of the past? Explain.

Background Info: During the Great Depression, many Americans found themselves unemployed and impoverished. Some private organizations began to offer free bread, resulting in long breadlines like the one pictured here.

Title: Breadline at McCauley Water Street Mission under Brooklyn Bridge, New York. Date: c. 1930-1934



1. How is the establishment of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) connected to the social conditions depicted in the photograph?
2. How is the Wall Street Crash of 1929 connected to the social conditions depicted in the photograph?

Mexican Immigration 1930's Assignment

Document A: American Federation of Labor

This document is an excerpt from testimony Edward F. McGrady gave before Congress on June 20, 1932. McGrady was a representative of the American Federation of Labor, one of the country's largest labor unions. Congress was considering a bill that would increase employment by funding construction projects.

Now, what is the situation? In the last two weeks there have been 287,000 men and women thrown out on the streets without jobs. At this very hour today, according to the most conservative figures, there are 10,867,000 people walking the streets. . . .

The figures have gone up almost to 11,000,000 without any jobs at all. Have we any hope that the conditions are going to get better? Not at all. . . .

Now, what is the situation in recent months industrially? In New York State, the factory pay rolls fell 10 per cent last month, down to 45 percent of what they were three years ago. Steel production in the Pittsburgh district is at 15 percent of capacity. Eighty-five per cent of the steel industry is without any work at all. The New York Times business-activity index on June 12 showed a new low of 55, meaning that it is 55 percent normal. Cotton has reached the lowest price in 200 years. Orders on the books of the United States Steel Company are at the lowest point in the company's history after 14 months of consecutive declining. Farm products are selling at 64.8 percent of 1915 prices and the tendency is downward. Pig-iron production in May was down 60 percent from May, 1931. . . .

So that all signs indicate that we are heading into very serious trouble in this country. We are warning the leaders of the nation that they have got to meet this situation adequately just as soon as they can, and certainly they have got to meet this situation before this Congress is allowed to adjourn, and if they do not meet it adequately and courageously and boldly and intelligently, I say to you the cry will not be to save the hungry but the cry next winter will be to save this government of the United States.

Source: Testimony of Edward F. McGrady, Federal Emergency Measures to Relieve Unemployment, United States Senate, (1932).

1. What was the American Federation of Labor? Who did it represent?
2. According to Miller, what condition was the American economy in?
3. What might his purpose have been for testifying before Congress? How might this have affected what he said?

The Dust Bowl was a period of severe dust storms that badly damaged agriculture in the United States Plains in the 1930s. Approximately 3.5 million people left the Plains. Many of these refugees moved to California. Dorothea Lange, a photographer employed by the Farm Security Administration, took the pictures and wrote the accompanying notes below.



Photograph by Dorothea Lange taken in March 1935. Lange's note on the photo: "Drought refugees from Oklahoma looking for work in the pea fields of California. Near San Jose Mission."



Photograph by Dorothea Lange taken in May 1937. Lange's note on the photo: "Drought refugee families are now mingling with and supplanting Mexican field laborers in the Southwest. Near Chandler, Arizona."

1. Who was Dorothea Lange?
2. When and where were these photographs taken?
3. In what industries and in what region did most Mexicans in the U.S. work?
4. Given your answer to Question 3, how might these photographs help to explain the drastic change in Mexican migration to the U.S. in the 1930s?
5. Why did Mexican migration to the U.S. change drastically in the 1930s? What evidence from Documents A and B support this claim?

Document C: Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce

Arthur G. Arnoll was the secretary and general manager of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, a federation of Los Angeles businesses. He wrote this letter in response to a University of Michigan student's request for information on migratory labor in California.

DECEMBER 18, 1936.

Mr. G. J. Brunske,
722 Church St.
Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Dear Mr. Brunske: I have your favor before me, requesting information regarding the casual or migratory labor in California. . . .

I am enclosing a number of articles touching upon this question, particularly concerned with the type of labor which during the war and those years following the war up to 1929 proved all that we could ask—I mean the American or Mexican stem and the Mexican immigrant.

California's agriculture for all these years required the services of a migrating army of some 170,000 of these people. . . .

During the first years of the depression we lost about 160,000 of our Mexican people. They were frightened out of the state, mostly by the cry of the vast increase in population which had within recent years come into California from temperate region areas and unfamiliar with the fact that the Mexican laborer was an older citizen as a rule than himself, yet adhered to the slogan "do not hire a Mexican if a white man is out of work." . . .

Yours very truly,

Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce,

A.G. Arnoll, Secretary and General Manager

Source: Letter from A.G. Arnoll, secretary and general manager of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, to G. J. Brunske.

1. What was the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce?
2. In the last paragraph, Arnoll wrote that employers followed the rule "do not hire a Mexican if a white man is out of work." What does this suggest about both social and economic conditions for Mexicans in the U.S. at the time?
3. Does this account corroborate (support) Document B? Explain.

Document D: Apology Act for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program

This is an excerpt from a bill passed by the California legislature in 2005.

The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) Beginning in 1929, government authorities and certain private sector entities in California and throughout the United States undertook an aggressive program to forcibly remove persons of Mexican ancestry from the United States. . . .

(c) In total, it is estimated that two million people of Mexican ancestry were forcibly relocated to Mexico, approximately 1.2 million of whom had been born in the United States, including the State of California.

(d) Throughout California, massive raids were conducted on MexicanAmerican communities, resulting in the clandestine removal of thousands of people, many of whom were never able to return to the United States, their country of birth.

(e) These raids also had the effect of coercing thousands of people to leave the country in the face of threats and acts of violence.

(f) These raids targeted persons of Mexican ancestry, with authorities and others indiscriminately characterizing these persons as “illegal aliens” even when they were United States citizens or permanent legal residents.

(g) Authorities in California and other states instituted programs to wrongfully remove persons of Mexican ancestry and secure transportation arrangements with railroads, automobiles, ships, and airlines to effectuate the wholesale removal of persons out of the United States to Mexico.

(h) As a result of these illegal activities, families were forced to abandon, or were defrauded of, personal and real property, which often was sold by local authorities as “payment” for the transportation expenses incurred in their removal from the United States to Mexico. . . .

The State of California apologizes to those individuals . . . for the fundamental violations of their basic civil liberties and constitutional rights committed during the period of illegal deportation and coerced emigration. The State of California regrets the suffering and hardship those individuals and their families endured as a direct result of the government sponsored Repatriation Program of the 1930s.

Source: California Senate Bill-670, Apology Act for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program, (2005).

1. What kind of document is this? What purpose did it serve?
2. How might the gap in time between when this law was passed and the events it discusses make it a more reliable source of information about Mexican immigration in the 1930s?
3. Does this document corroborate Document C? Explain.
4. Why did Mexican migration to the U.S. change drastically in the 1930s? What evidence from Documents C and D support this claim?