
Drougths, Dust Storms - Rural Life

Book FOUR





1

Winged Attack and Other Invaders

An invasion was sweeping the country. GRASSHOPPERS. They devoured wheat, corn, and potato fields. They ate grass and trees. In South Dakota, one farmer turned his turkey flock into the fields only to have them return featherless.

Grasshoppers were inside houses --under rugs and behind pictures on walls. During the 1930s one natural disaster after another struck, leaving farmers with damaged soil and ruined crops. When it happened year after year, it was too much for those who made their living from the land.



ATTACK OF THE BUNNIES!

* **VIEW THE VIDEO.** Often a natural disaster (such as the ongoing drought and dust storm in the midwest) upsets the “balance of nature.” After viewing the film, answer the following:

- * How do you feel about the jackrabbit roundups? Do you think the farmers were justified?
- * How does the attack of the grasshoppers, jackrabbits, spiders, and centipedes explain what is meant by “balance of nature?”

Grasshoppers weren’t the only invaders reeking havoc! Jackrabbits were everywhere; their natural predators, the wolf and large birds left seeking water elsewhere. The jackrabbits ate everything green, causing farmers to attack them.

Many dangerous insects moved indoors --the drought was too much for them too. It as a miserable time --the attack from living things only made it more unbearable.





2

FLOODS

In many places, the floods of 1935 caused people to climb trees to escape the raging floodwaters. There were no emergency personnel then to help in relief efforts.

When the water finally subsided, farmers discovered dead farm animals and driftwood and trash covering their farmland. Floods hit the same area several times --each destroying homes and ways of making a living. Over 4000 farmers were left homeless.

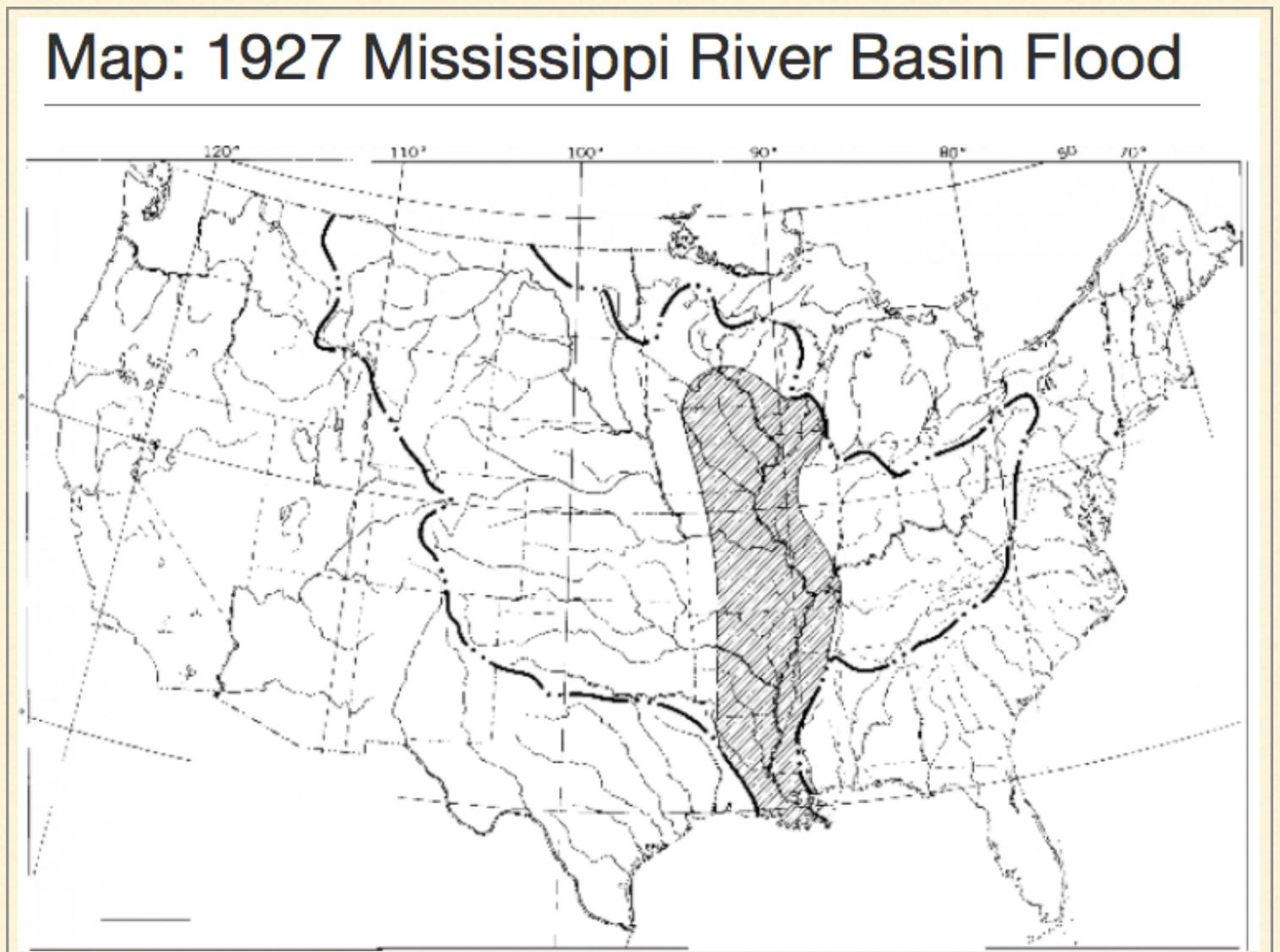
Things were so bad, the government set up temporary tent cities. People in 11 states fled to the camps, In Arkansas over a million acres of farmland were affected. Thousands of farmers and “sharecroppers” were left homeless. It is estimated that 20,000 mules, cows, dogs, cats, and chickens were rescued. Despite that, over 34,000 animals were lost.



* The image above shows the floodwaters in Arkansas. These floods were the result of rivers --especially the huge Mississippi River-- overflowing their banks. Even this year, there have been floods in parts of Arkansas. Look at the map of the 1927 flood.

Many in the Weiner area were affected by the 1927 flood. The old Weiner High School gym (on left) was used to house those whose homes were underwater.

* Which states were affected by the Mississippi River flood? Do you think dealing with a flood would be more difficult in 1927 than today? Why or why not?





3

The DUST BOWL

* Watch the [VIDEO](#). How does this video show the connection between science and agriculture?

Floods were replaced by endless days of scorching heat and rainless skies. Howling winds swept up rich topsoil and replaced it with dunes of dust.

For years farmers had plowed up the prairie grasses and cut down trees to plant crops, season after season. The soil nutrients were gone. Livestock had eaten all the vegetation, leaving the land bare.

Day after day of 100 degree temperatures and high wind swept across Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Colorado, and New Mexico. People called the storms “black blizzards.” Housewives hung wet sheets over doors and windows to keep the dust out. People wore masks to keep the dust out of their noses and mouths. Schools and businesses closed. People coughed up dirt.

Fields looked like oceans of dirt. Houses were mounded with walls of dust. Nothing green could be seen. Cattle were starving and dying of thirst.



4

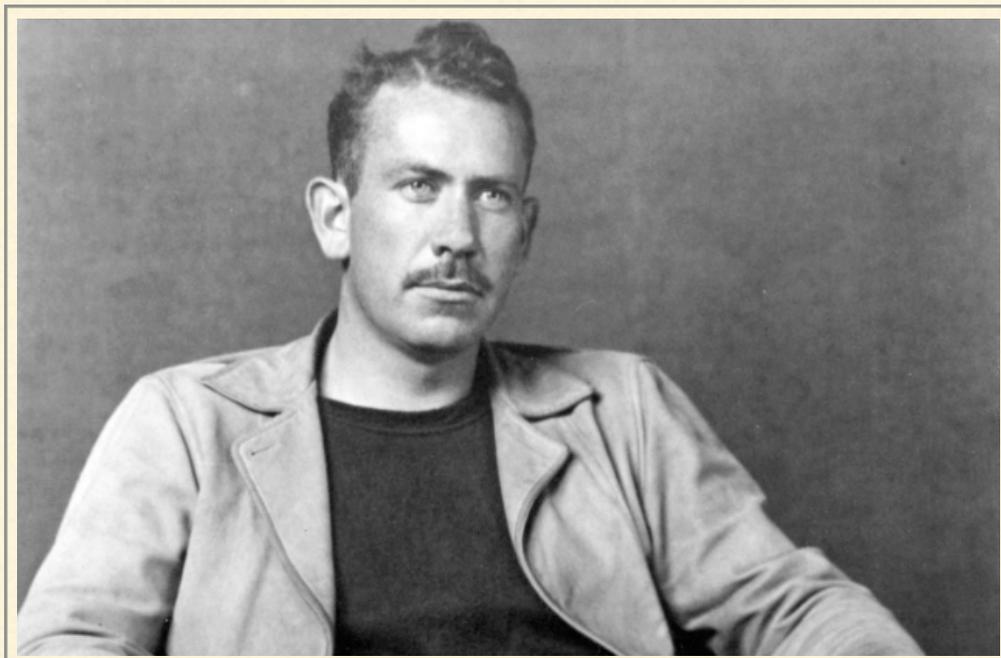
Moving WEST

Giving up after years of hardship, many packed up the little they had and left, searching for work as migrant workers on farms along the west coast of California. They heard workers were needed there. They believed they would be successful. But the hoped for jobs were rarely found and those that were paid very little. The life of the migrant worker was a harsh one.

Sometimes, the company that owned the farm ground provided workers with rickety shacks or flimsy tents. When it rained the water came in. Everyone had to share a water source and use out-houses.

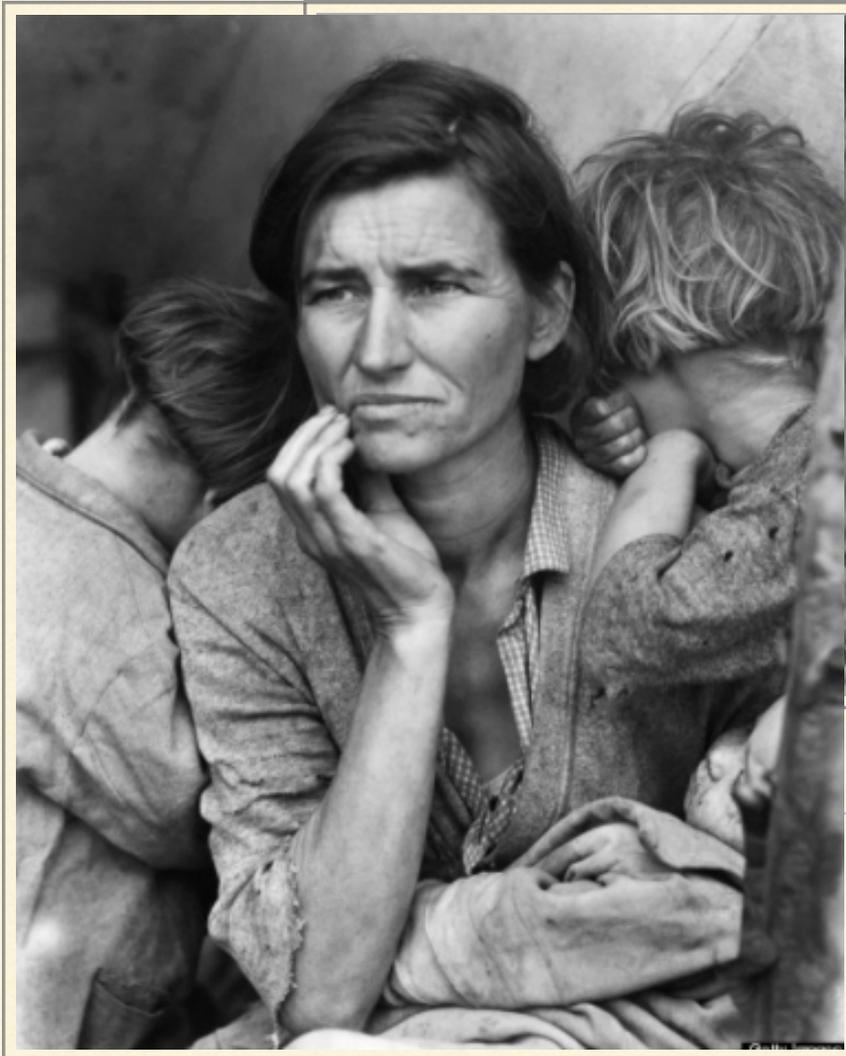
The forced migration of farmers from the Dust Bowl to California sadly caused people already living there to fear and dislike those coming in. They wanted to deny access to their state. They gave the migrants the name of “Okies” --thinking all of them were from Oklahoma.

The famous author John Steinbeck described the conditions of those leaving and heading to California and their lives once they arrived, in his book, "The Grapes of Wrath". He follows a fictional family living in a very real historical time. He tells the true story of how California police established a border patrol, called the "Bum Blockade," at all major railroad and road crossings to stop people from entering the state. He tells how local police repeatedly burned down the makeshift camps of the migrants. The book was made into an award winning movie.



Steinbeck's book caused people to talk -- everyone was reading it. View the [VIDEO](#). Why do you think historical fiction has power to make people care?





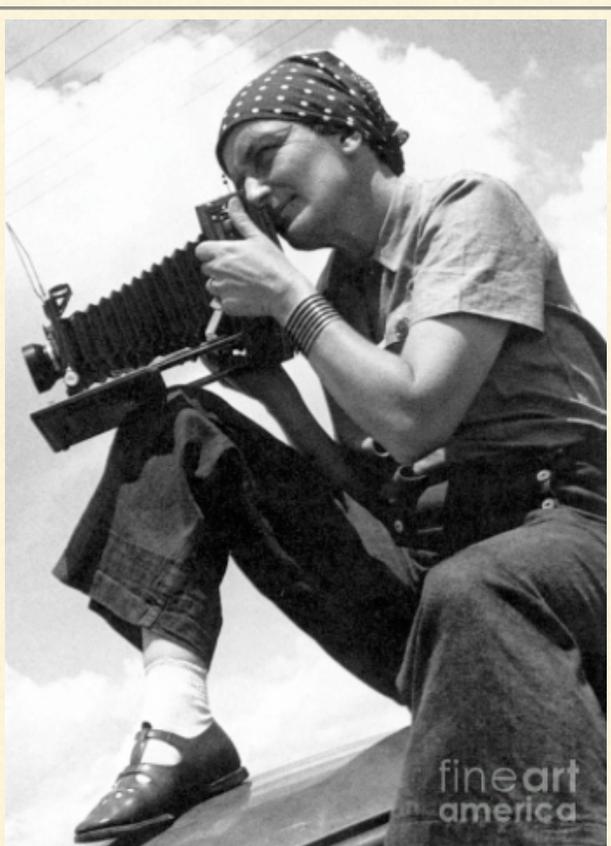
The plight, worry and despair of the Dust Bowl Migrants was captured by FSA photographer Dorothea Lange (May 26, 1895 – October 11, 1965) It was Dorothea Lange who took one of the most moving photographs of the era.

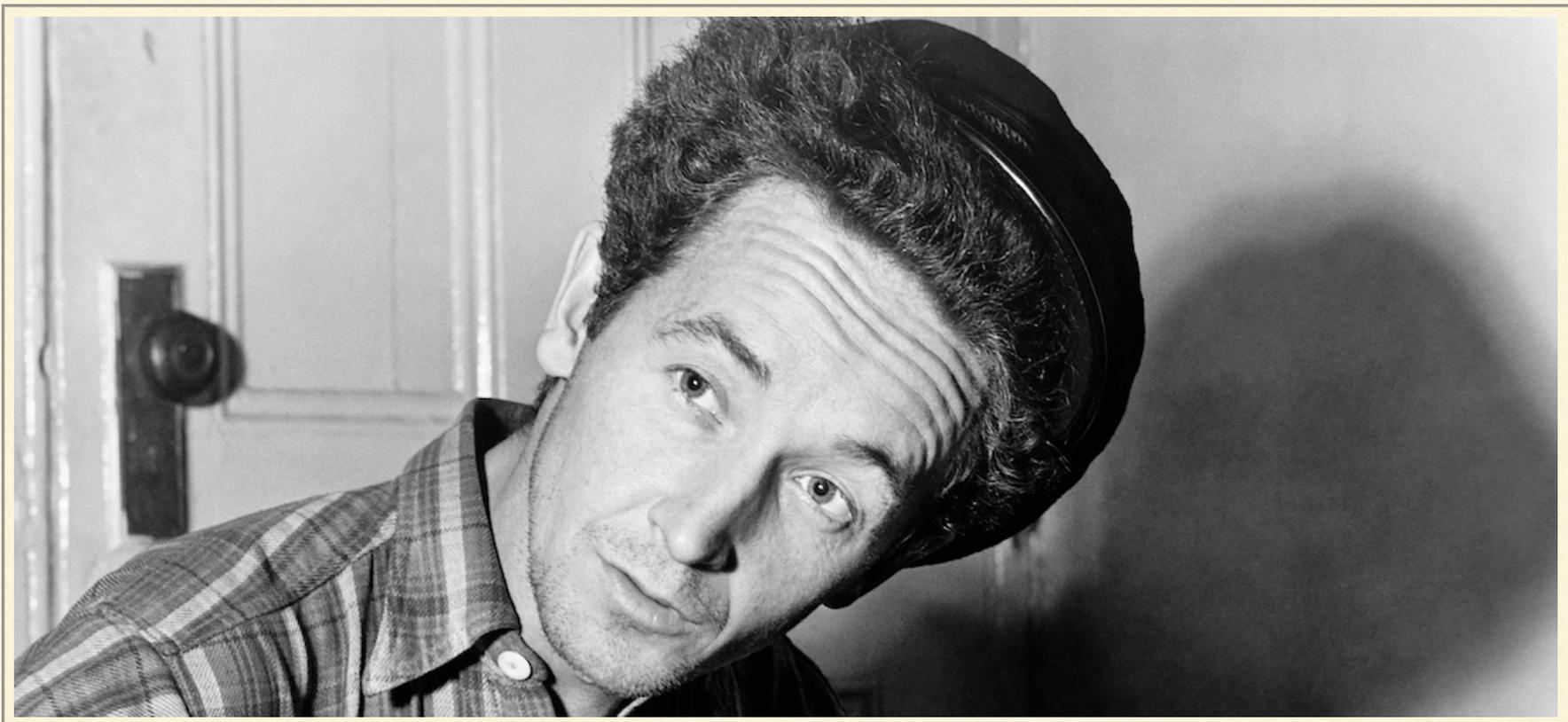
Dorothea Lange

The photograph is of a 'Migrant Mother' whose name was Florence Owens Thompson (September 1, 1903 – September 16, 1983) and was taken in Nipomo, California. Florence Owens Thompson was aged 32 years old when the photo was taken.

A destitute mother of seven children. She had just sold her car tires to buy food for her family. Florence is pictured nursing her daughter Norma. Her daughters, Katherine and Ruby, hid behind their mother as Dorothea Lange took the shot.

*****Lange's photo of "Migrant Mother" is the most famous photograph taken during the Great Depression. In your BEST descriptive and insightful writing, explain "Why?"**





6

Woody Guthrie

[“So Long”](#)

[“Do Re Me”](#)

[“I Ain’t Got No Home”](#)

[“Talking Dust Bowl”](#)

Woody Guthrie is closely identified with the Dust Bowl and Great Depression of the 1930s. His songs from that time period earned him the nickname “Dust Bowl Troubadour.”

Guthrie experienced the fury of Black Sunday—a severe dust storm that swept across the Midwestern states on April 14, 1935, and inspired Guthrie to write the song, “So Long, It’s Been Good to Know You.” After Black Sunday, Guthrie joined the ranks of Okies migrating to California in search of work. Many of his works—“Do Re Mi,” “I Ain’t Got No Home,” “Talking Dust Bowl,” and others—chronicle the difficult conditions faced by the working class Okies in their new home.

*****LISTEN TO THE FOUR Woody Guthrie songs, using the links to the left. Pay attention to the lyrics and the melody. Which do you think best expresses the feelings of that time period in a way that might cause those listening on the radio to sing along and THINK about what he is saying?**



7

Tenant Farmers

Visit the [Southern Tenant Farmers Museum's website](#). The museum is located in Tyronza, Arkansas and is part of Arkansas State University.



Male or female. Black or white. Farming in the 1930s in places that were not reached by the Dust Storms was a hard way to make a living during the Depression.

Tenant farmers did not own the land they farmed. Most were sharecroppers. That means they provided the labor for a landowner, who supplied the seed, tools, and machinery. The earnings were split after harvest. But the sharecroppers part was barely enough to survive.

Most sharecroppers were in the house and lived in bad houses provided by the landowner --usually three rooms with windows, but no screens. No bathrooms and drinking water from contaminated wells.

Landowners kept the “books” and usually paid the sharecroppers in scrip --a type of money (not real) that could only be spent at the local store which was also owned by the landowner. There was no way out.

Most children did not get to go to school and had to work in the fields. Life was hard.