

✓ Question ^[2]

What is the image's date, title, & creator? 1935. *Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged thirty-two. Father is native Californian. Nipomo, California.* Dorothea Lange.

What type of person might have created this image & for what purpose? Dorothea Lange worked for the US Government's Farm Security Administration (FSA). The FSA was a New Deal agency designed to combat rural poverty during the Great Depression. One of its main goals was to encourage sharecroppers, poor farmers, and laborers to resettle in group farms, or homesteads. The FSA hired 11 photographers, including Lange, to provide visual evidence that (1) there was great need among the rural poor for federal assistance, and (2) the FSA was meeting the needs. In short, Lange attempted not just to inform, but to move viewers into support of the FSA and its programs [3].

Guess was it personal or published, candid or posed, amateur or professional? This photo was published, the people are clearly posed (they all seem to be looking at the camera) and Lange was a professional photographer working for the FSA.

It's a desolate, rural area the family is currently residing in; they're likely to be squatting. There's trash beside the tent: maybe they've been there a while. The kids' clothes are dirty and torn. Their facial expressions suggest loss, fear, and devastation. They seem to be alone: there are no other families nearby. Their shelter is made from very raggedy, old blankets sewn together to form a makeshift tent held together by rope and long sticks. There are two suitcases. An older child is resting against a rickety rocking-chair. They may be living here because they've lost their home (e.g., eviction, foreclosure). Farmers fleeing the Dust Bowl (called "Okies" because many were from Oklahoma) were unable to afford housing. Many families lived in makeshift shacks, tents, and shanties outside cities. Over 350,000 farmers left the nation's heartland and moved West [6].

American farmers prospered during WWI by supplying soldiers with wheat and vegetables. After the war, many farmers borrowed heavily from banks to expand their farms or buy new, more-advanced equipment. Thus, farmers produced more goods than ever, often leading to surpluses that they either couldn't sell or could only sell very low prices [5]. Farmers unable to sell their crops were then unable to repay their loans, including their mortgages. Many farmers defaulted on loans and lost their farms.

✓ Observe



Here are five people, a woman and four children (ages 12, 9, 7, and under 1), who look to exemplify the rural poor. The woman in the photo is Florence Owens, mother of seven children, migrating from the Dust Bowl to California. Lange said: "*She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food* [4]."

Also hurting farmers at this time was a severe drought turning soil into dust. Much of the Great Plains at his time experienced the worst drought ever recorded. No rain = no growing crops = soil erosion = dust storms. A newspaper reported about the drought: "*Three little words achingly familiar on the Western farmer's tongue, rule life in the dust bowl of the continent—if it rains* [7]." Over ten million acres of land lost five inches of topsoil [8]. The term "Dust Bowl" stuck.

✓ Reflect

How does this image compare with other evidence? Many other historical photos of this era also depict aspects of poverty and desperation. This photo evokes tremendous emotion, perhaps more than most of the others taken by Lange and the other FSA photographers. The *Breadline* photo is similar as they portray the effects of the depression, however, the men in *Breadline* are well dressed while the women and children in this photo are dressed in rags. The *TVA* photo is also rather rural while the others are urban. The *Bonus March*, *Sub-treasury*, and *TVA* photos all display active crowds while this one shows only one passive, suffering family.

Why might other evidence (messages and data) agree or disagree with this image? The purpose of this photo is to display the harsh effects of the depression: fear, desperation; others show *causes* and *responses* of Depression Era society. This photo was taken by a professional photographer who was appealing to a much larger audience: the entire nation.

What else do you need or want to know about this image? How exactly was this photo used by Lange and the FSA: printed in newspapers, brochures? Where are the other three children mentioned in the title? Are they with the father (also mentioned in the title) and why are they all separated? And for how long will they be separated?

In about one sentence state the image's overall message. This is what the "Great Depression" did to tens-of-thousands (or more) of families: forcing them to live in squalor. Everyone should support the federal government (FSA) in its efforts to help desperate families.

Lange, D. (1935). *Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged thirty-two. Father is native Californian. Nipomo, California.* Library of Congress [1].



Citations →

Citations: [#] throughout the primer

1. Lange, D. (1935). *Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged thirty-two. Father is native Californian. Nipomo, California.* Library of Congress. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3b06165/>

2. Adapted from the Library of Congress's "Teacher's Guides and Analysis Tools" webpage found: <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html>

3. Gorman, J. (2001). *The history of the Farm Security Administration.* Retrieved from <http://www.oberlin.edu/library/papers/honorhistory/2001-Gorman/FSA/FSAhistor/fshist3.html>

4. DuBois, E. C., & Dumenil, L. (2005). *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents.* New York, NY: Bedford/St.Martin's, p. 499

5. Hart, D. (2002). *History Alive! U.S. History.* Teachers Curriculum Institute, p. 411

6. DuBois, E. C., & Dumenil, L. (2005). *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents.* New York, NY: Bedford/St.Martin's, p. 498

7. http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/water_02.html

8. Hart, D. (2002). *History Alive! U.S. History.* Teachers Curriculum Institute, p. 412