



People in Camps.

1935. Dorothea Lange, photographer. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Paul S. Taylor.

"Shelters were made of almost every conceivable thing - burlap, canvas, palm branches." - A California minister's report of a labor camp in the Imperial Valley

In this photograph, a family gathers outside their "home" in California, a typical shack in a camp of Mexican and Mexican American migrant farm workers during the 1930s' Great Depression. The walls and roofs of the shack are patched together from different materials, reminiscent of the quote above. Migrant farm workers of all races lived in temporary camps like this as they moved from farm to farm to follow the seasonal work.

RESPONSE

Does this image change your image of Esperanza's living situation in California? Why or why not? (You may use the back of this sheet.)



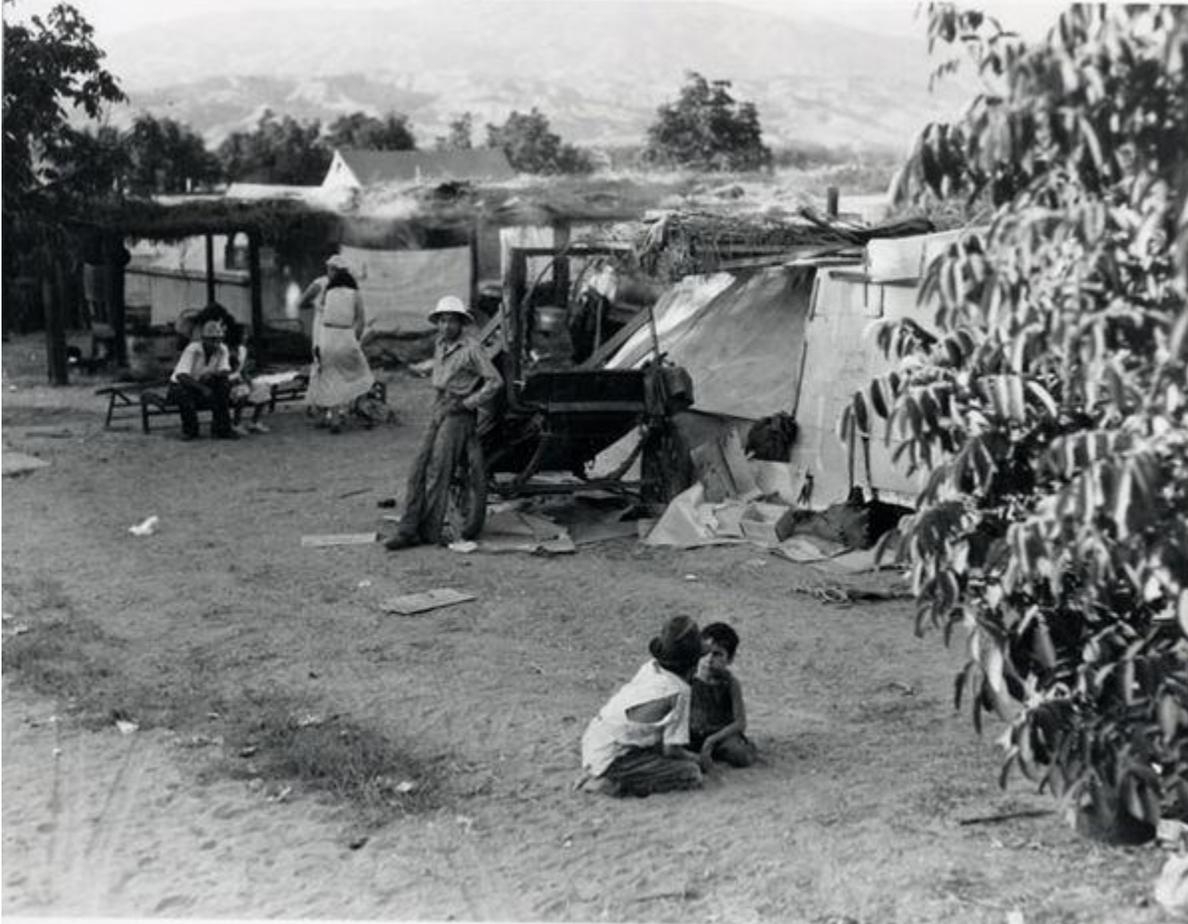
A young Mexican farm worker plays guitar and sings in a Coachella Valley labor camp. 1935. Dorothea Lange, photographer. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Paul S. Taylor.

The corrido, or Mexican folk ballad, was and remains one of the strongest artistic expressions of Mexican culture. Through the corrido, day-to-day life could be made into art; all that was needed was a voice and maybe an instrument. Mexican and Mexican American migrant farm workers were often prevented by white law enforcement from entering "white" businesses or even from entering "white" towns, sometimes actually forced to remain on a farm owner's property until the harvest was completed. Partially as a result of this forced isolation, the Mexican and Mexican American farm workers retained strong ties to their Mexican roots.

Response

How do Esperanza and her family preserve their culture in the labor camps?

Picture 3



Mexican apricot

pickers. June 22, 1935. Dorothea Lange, photographer. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Paul S. Taylor.

"[When] they have finished harvesting my crops, I will kick them out on the country road. My obligation is ended."

- California farmer

When shelters were provided for migrant farm workers, they were usually tiny shacks. Dirt floors were common, as was the lack of functional walls, roofs, and doors. Camps would only rarely have running water. Usually, water had to be carried from a river or ditch, the presence of human or animal waste and farming chemicals in the unfiltered water a constant danger. Often, farm owners charged rent even for such inadequate and dangerous shelters. This photograph, however, is not just an image of the past. Today, farm workers are still fighting farm owners who do not provide basic, humane living and working conditions.

Response:

How would you respond to the living conditions described above, as well as the working conditions that Esperanza must go through in the labor camps? Would you be able to survive? Why or why not?

Picture 4



A man and young child harvesting carrots in the Imperial Valley during the Great Depression. 1935. Dorothea Lange, photographer. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Paul S. Taylor.

"The authorities would only pay attention to [the farm owner].... [T]hey told me that if I didn't pay they would take my wife and my children to work."

- Elias Garza, migrant farm worker

The child pictured above, helping to harvest carrots, would have been a commonplace sight before, during, and after the Great Depression. Farm workers had no day care, and often all members of the family, from toddlers to elders, worked in the fields together. Mothers carried babies on their backs, and children were required to contribute to the family efforts as soon as they were able. Children often could not attend school because they had to work. This was exacerbated by racial segregation: Mexican and Mexican American children, along with other non-white children, were often not allowed in white schools.

Response

Are you required to help your family at home? What types of responsibilities do you have in your family?

Picture 5



Labor. ca. 1935. Dorothea Lange, photographer. Gelatin silver print. Collection of Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Paul S. Taylor.

"I do not want to see the condition arise again when white men who are reared and educated in our schools have got to bend their backs and skin their fingers to pull those little beets.... You can let us have the only class of labor that will do the work, or close the beet factories, because our people will not do it, and I say frankly I do not want them to do it."

- Sugar beet growers' spokesman (1920s)

The men in this photograph are bent double at the waist while harvesting crops by hand. These Mexican or Mexican American men were photographed in 1935 performing the kind of back-breaking "stoop labor" that California farmers claimed white men could not (and even should not) be hired to do. California farmers claimed that Asian and Mexican workers were physically suited for hard farm labor because they were used to stooping, crouching, and bending, while white people were accustomed to standing up straight. White public opinion quickly embraced the racist idea that white people would be lowered and degraded by such work.

Response:

Does this image and information change your perception of Marta in *Esperanza Rising*? How?

