

Primary Source Materials

#1 Effects of the Dust Storms

Towns Blanketed in Dust

"The worst dust storm in Texas history **engulfed** most of the state today, drifting dense clouds of **sediment** southward from the drought **parched** middle west. A cold **norther** brought the dust into the state, moving it swiftly toward the Gulf during the night. A thick coating of dust covered the crops and buildings and seeped into countless homes."

"With the dust bad enough this morning, the worst of the storm was reported to have struck **Shamrock** about midnight when the sand was so bad that street lights were hidden."

— "The Shamrock Texan (Shamrock, Tex.), Thursday, April 11, 1935."
The Portal to Texas History

Engulfed: Completely surrounded, covered, or overwhelmed.

Sediment: natural, solid materials such as rock, minerals, or soil, transported by air or water over great distances.

Parched: Extremely dry

Norther: A strong, sudden, cold wind from the North.

Shamrock: A Texas town in the panhandle east of Amarillo on the Oklahoma border.

#2 Causes & Effects of the Dust Storms

Suffering from Afflictions

"Thousands of people in the Midwest and the Southwest today are suffering from coughs, sinus trouble, or other **afflictions** brought on or **aggravated** by the recent dust storms. Soil from the Great Plains is being blown away by hundreds of **tons**, some of it being carried clear to the Atlantic ocean This vast table land, east of the Rockies now could become what it was called in early days, the Great American Desert, if all its cover be ripped off. The summer droughts of 1934 have made this wind **erosion** worse."

— "The Denison Press (Denison, Tex.), Wednesday, May 12, 1937."
The Portal to Texas History

Afflictions: Pain, distress, problems, and diseases.

Aggravated: Made worse

Ton: 1 ton = 2,000 pounds

Erosion: A process in which wind or water gradually wears away, breaks down, and transports soil, rock, or surface material to new locations.

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#3 Causes & Effects of the Dust Bowl

Exploitation of the Land

The summer droughts of 1934 have made this wind **erosion** worse, but it has been developing over a considerable period as wide **pasture** lands have been plowed for wheat or cotton. **Shortsighted** land policies have allowed the **exploitation** of dust bowl soil, with the result that a large part of the essential topsoil has blown away and the remainder is likely to be so within a few years. Much of the least profitable of the dust bowl land already has been abandoned.

- “The Denison Press (Denison, Tex.), Wednesday, May 12, 1937.”
The Portal to Texas History

Erosion: A process in which wind or water gradually wears away, breaks down, and transports soil, rock, or surface material to new locations.

Pasture: Land covered with grass used for grazing livestock.

Shortsighted: Doing something without considering the long-term effects of your actions.

#4 New Deal Programs to Address the Dust Bowl

Conserving the Land

“It should not cost the Government an impossible **sum** to include this land in its **forestation** program with **CCC** help available to do the planting. For the remainder of the dust bowl land, it has been suggested that land use regulations be set up to prevent misuse of land that allows the soil to be blown away. Some kind of **damper** is needed to prevent this large area from reverting to desert.”

- “The Denison Press (Denison, Tex.), Wednesday, May 12, 1937.”
The Portal to Texas History

Exploitation: Misuse or abuse of something

Sum: Amount of money

Forestation: A process of establishing trees in an area

CCC: Civilian Conservation Corps. A New Deal program to protect the environment

Damper: Something to restrain people from doing something

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#5 New Deal Programs to Address the Dust Bowl

Restorative Farming Practices

“Through a half century of boom era farming [Plains] resources were drained and an attempt was made to restore them. Years ago there was no such thing as crop rotation, nor did a washed out hillside cause much concern.”

“It was not enough that farmers learned to leave a good ground cover during winter months, nor was it enough to learn that terracing will prevent erosion from both causes—washouts and blowing. It took money to carry out these plans. First, the Farm Security administration offered loans to farmers who would handle their land scientifically, making further loans if they wished to lease adjacent neglected ‘blow land’ and anchor, it down.”

“Though 220,000 dust bowl farms have been placed under good management this way, and although the Jones-Bankhead act permits the government to purchase remaining idle blow land, the new spirit of cooperative attack is best illustrated by still another method – the soil conservation district.”

“Given U.S. Assistance. This is a simple plan. Farmers in a certain area can form an association to lease abandoned land, thereby qualifying for a special payment from the Agricultural Adjustment administration.”

— “The Lampasas Daily Leader (Lampasas, Tex.), Wednesday, October 26, 1938.” The Portal to Texas History.

Boom era: A period of time when the economy was good and industries were growing rapidly.

Restore: To return something to its original condition.

Crop Rotation: A farming practice that protects the soil by rotating what types of crops you plant.

Terracing: A farming practice that protects the soil from erosion by shaping the land into steps.

Adjacent: next to

“Blow land”: Land that was severely eroded, causing it to blow away in high winds very easily

Idle: Not being used

Cooperative attack: Working together to solve the problem of the Dust Bowl

Lease: Rent

Thereby: As a result

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#6 Causes of the Dust Bowl

No Concern for their Neighbors

“50 years ago, each midwestern **homestead** was an independent kingdom on which the farmer lived without concern for high neighbor’s well-being. The land was new and good; no problem was bigger than the homestead itself. But since free land disappeared, since year-after-year **cultivation** began loosening the soil from its anchors, problems have sprung up that are not **localized**. **It all boils down to** the problem of preserving our land. This is far more important than the matter of agricultural prices and **surplus**. When land begins eroding and blowing away it spreads like a cancerous disease.”

- “The Lampasas Daily Leader (Lampasas, Tex.), Wednesday, October 26, 1938.” *The Portal to Texas History*.

Homestead: A home with its surrounding land that is used for self-sufficient farming

Cultivation: Growing crops

Localized: Only in one small location

“It all boils down to”: an expression used to explain the most essential point of a larger, more complex topic

Surplus: Having more than you need.

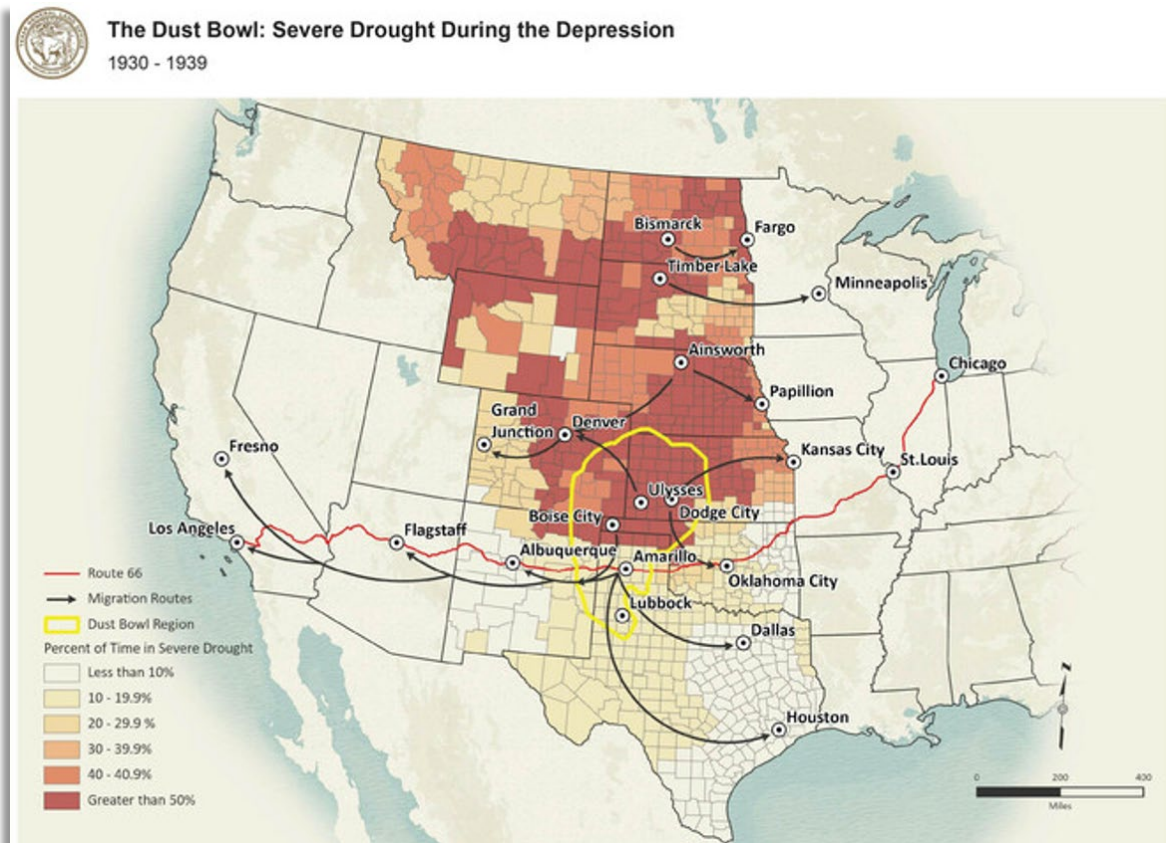
#7 Dust Storms: A First-Hand Account

“Well, I was fourteen years old on Black Sunday, and Black Sunday happened to be April 14th, 1945.... We had celebrated my birthday and we had gone back to our farm and we put the car in the barn. You don't have garages, you have a barn. I started for the house and I was just about to get to the ... fence and that thing hit. It was bright sunshine before then, and when it hit I couldn't see my hand like this. It was black. It was Black Sunday. So, I went ahead and managed to get through the Corral gate and locked it again so the cattle wouldn't get out. And then I noticed there was a little tiny speck of light up toward the house, and my mother and my youngest sister had put the lamp, and I made it to the house. But my stepfather, he didn't make it, so he spent the night in the barn, which was probably just as well, it's just not as good a place to be.... You could see those clouds forming when they were coming in and they were rolling. It looked to me like they were about 500 feet in the air and they were rolling like this, just rolling towards you.”

- Oral History Interview with John Karl Rankin, August 29, 2011, audio recording, August 29, 2011. *The Portal to Texas History*

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#8 The Dust Bowl *A Map of the Affected Areas*



– *The Dust Bowl: Severe Drought During the Depression*. 2022. Texas GLO Map Database.

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#9 In Search of a New Beginning *People Fleeing the Dust Bowl & Migrating West*



A photographer named Dorothea Lange took photos documenting the challenges people faced during the Great Depression. Many of her photos focused on the people fleeing the Dust Bowl seeking opportunities in California. In this image, an Oklahoma family is shown in their car with many of their belongings as they travel to California.

- Lange, Dorothea, photographer. Oklahoma dust bowl refugees. San Fernando, California, June 1935. *The Library of Congress*

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#10 The Dust Bowl *A Massive Wall of Dust*



A dust storm approaching Stratford, Texas, in the Texas Panhandle in April 1935.

- National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service. *The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*.

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#11 New Deal Programs to Address the Dust Bowl

The Civilian Conservation Corps

“Eagerly grasping the opportunity thus offered, the CCC enrollee has built forest fire protection systems and planted vast forests for the future. He has built roads and trails, dams and terraces. He has made or developed parks that give recreation to millions. He has helped check erosion and demonstrated proper land uses. He has created lakes and ponds, stocked them with fish, and planted refuges for the fast diminishing wildlife of the country.

“He has made the Nation conscious of the need for conservation and proved the benefits to be derived from it. He, himself, has learned the true meaning of conservation—‘to take care of’--for the enrollee sends home a part of his earnings each month, often in this way affording the major protection his family has against need.

“All this is possible because his Government, striving to make him self-reliant and independent, offers him employment with remuneration for the work he accomplishes in the conservation of the Nation’s natural resources.”

– “The Lampasas Leader (Lampasas, Tex.), March 31, 1939.” *The Portal to Texas History*

Enrollee: A person enrolled in a program

Vast: Extremely large

Dams: A large barrier placed in a body of water to regulate and control the flow, prevent floods, store drinking water, and generate electricity.

Terraces: Shaping sloped land into steps to prevent erosion and manage water runoff.

Refuges: Safe places

Diminishing:
Decreasing

Derived from:
Obtained or received from something

Remuneration:
Compensation;
Payment