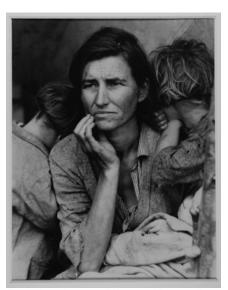
Museum of Contemporary Photography Columbia College Chicago

On the Road: Robert Frank The Farm Security Administration Photographers Dorothea Lange

September 5th-November 1, 2008



Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother #6, 1936

Additional Information for Viewers

This resource packet, which contains additional information on the artists on view, questions for looking and discussion, and activities was produced as a viewer supplement to the exhibitions *On the Road: The Farm Security Administration Photographers; Dorothea Lange*; and Robert Frank. Images by each of these artists can be accessed from the museum's website at www.collections.mocp.org/main.php?module=objects Note: The library of congress website is also a rich source of information, photographs, oral histories and sound and music recordings from the Great Depression along with lesson plans. www.loc.gov

The exhibitions, presentations, and related programs of the MoCP are sponsored in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services; After School Matters; the Lannan Foundation; the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; the National Endowment for the Arts; the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation; the Lange Burk Fund; the Palmer Foundation; U.S. Bank; The Mayer and Morris Kaplan Family Foundation, Target; American Airlines, the official airline of the MoCP; and our members.

Dorothea Lange

"The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera."
-Dorothea Lange

Though she is best known for her depression-era photographs that advocated political change and came to shape our view of one of the most tumultuous eras of American history, the career of Dorothea Lange was long and varied. Her keen interest in the lives of ordinary people and her deep empathy for human struggle led her to travel and photograph diverse subjects across the U.S. and around the world.

The Museum of Contemporary Photography's collection of works by Dorothea Lange is comprised of close to 500 images, most of which were acquired through a major gift from Katharine Taylor Loesch, daughter of the economist Paul Taylor, Lange's collaborator and second husband. This collection affords visitors to the museum's print study room an invaluable opportunity to view photographs from throughout her career and also work prints—multiple frames and images that vary in cropping and exposure timethat provide a glimpse into Lange's working process. The MoCP expanded these holdings through recent purchases of additional Farm Security Administration works by Lange and others, including the five frames on view that Lange took of the now iconic Migrant Mother.

On view here is a selection of Lange's Farm Security Administration photographs, as well as some of her post-war work including images documenting US Japanese internment camps and selections from the series Three Mormon Towns, which she made on assignment for Life magazine with Ansel Adams and her son Daniel Dixon.

Dorothea Lange was born in Hoboken, New Jersey in 1895. At the age of seven she contacted polio which left her with a permanent limp. A rebellious loner by nature, Lange cut school and educated herself roaming the streets and cultural institutions of New York. Despite never having owned a camera or having taken a picture, at eighteen she declared that she wanted to be a photographer and found work in the photo studio of Arnold Genthe. Lange later took classes with photographer Clarence White at Columbia University.

In 1918, at the beginning of what was supposed to be a "world tour," Lange was robbed in San Francisco and was forced to stay to look for work. She landed a job in a photo finishing business, eventually establishing herself in the artistic community and starting a successful portrait studio of her own. She married Maynard Dixon, a painter of Western landscapes, in 1920 and they had two children. While traveling with Dixon in the Southwest, Lange first experimented with working in the documentary tradition, photographing Native Americans on the reservation.

Documenting the Depression

As the economy worsened in the early 1930s and commission work dried up for Lange and Dixon, both artists felt a need to reflect the devastation they witnessed around them in their work. Dixon began a series of paintings on the Forgotten Man while Lange took to the streets of San Francisco with her camera. She displayed her photographs of striking workers, breadlines, and the downtrodden on the walls of her studio to raise awareness of human suffering among her friends and elite clientele who she claimed would comment, "Yes, but what will you do with these images?"

Photographer Willard Van Dyke organized an exhibition of Lange's work in 1934 where it was noticed by labor economist Paul Taylor. Taylor recognized photography's power as a tool of social research and in 1935 asked Lange to accompany him on a project researching and documenting the plight of migrant laborers, victims of an extreme drought, soil erosion and increasingly mechanized farming for the State

(California) Emergency Relief Administration. When his superiors questioned Taylor's need for a photographer, Lange was initially hired as a "typist." Lange observed Taylor's process of approaching, talking to, and writing about subjects and incorporated these methods into her own work, making captioning her photographs a vital part of her process.

Later that year, partly in response to evidence in Lange and Taylor's written and photographic reports, the federal government formed the Resettlement Administration (later renamed the Farm Security Administration) in an attempt alleviate rural poverty. Taylor, Lange and others worked under the direction of Roy Stryker for the historical section of the FSA, whose goal was to create and promote a record of a devastated rural America in part to help explain and justify the need for New Deal programs. Also in 1935, Taylor and Lange both divorced their spouses and married each other, beginning a life-long personal and professional partnership. They continued to record the effects of the Great Depression and in 1939 published the seminal work, An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion.

Notes on Migrant Mother

Dorothea Lange shot five frames in March of 1936, the day that she made the image of Florence Owens and her children that has come to be known as *Migrant Mother*.

She says: I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember that she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her her name or her history. She told me her age, 32. She said 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. There she sat in a lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.

Examining the five frames together gives viewers an insight into Lange's working process and also underscores the importance of editing. Lange and her boss Roy Stryker selected and distributed the tighter frame with the woman's hand resting on her chin that became the defining image of the Great Depression and is now one of the most widely known and reproduced images in the history of photography. The titles listed here are Lange's original, more descriptive titles. Throughout her career Lange often alternated between using the long captions she wrote at the time she made her images and shorter, sometimes more interpretive titles.

Lange retouched the negative to minimize the appearance of a thumb that appears at the lower right corner of the image, which she found to be distracting to the overall composition. Roy Stryker thought that removing the thumb from what was intended to be a "straight" documentary photograph and a historic record was unethical. The original and retouched images are both on view in the MoCP's exhibition. The ethical questions around the degree to which documentary photographs can be altered and still be considered "truthful" documents are still hotly debated today.

World War II

In 1940, as Congress allocated billions of dollars to prepare for war, the Depression and FSA faded. Lange was hired as the head photographer for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics documenting farm community life. In 1940 Lange also received a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship--she was the first woman to be granted the award--to photograph American farm life in communities of the Amana Society and the Mormons. Gastrointestinal problems that would plague her for the rest of her life curtailed this project and forced her to slow the pace of her work.

In 1942, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) hired Lange to document the government's forced evacuation of 110,000 Japanese Americans to internment camps under executive order 9066, the result of war-time racist paranoia. Lange and Taylor were openly critical of the policies of the WRA and Lange was often harassed and censored by military officials. Other photographers also worked for the WRA, but Lange's sensitive and substantial body of photographs of the interned became an essential record that over time helped raise awareness of the devastating effects of these policies and the dangers inherent in curtailing personal freedoms.

Lange's Post War Work

Plagued by ongoing health problems, Lange worked intermittently, documenting women and minority workers in booming war time industries and post-war consumer culture. In 1953 she began a project for Life magazine in collaboration with Ansel Adams that would be titled Three Mormon Towns. Working in Gunlock, Toquerville, and St. George, Utah, Lange documented the lives of the descendants of the original Mormon settlers, while Adams focused on the rugged rural landscape. Lange's son Daniel Dixon accompanied them and wrote the text that would accompany the published story. The MoCP holds close to two hundred images from this series.

Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s Lange continued to sporadically travel and work with Taylor and others, creating photographic essays on Ireland, Asia, the Middle East and Europe, She also photographed closer to home, recording the displaced residents and landscape of Berryessa, a California valley that was to be flooded by the Federal Government; the working life of Martin Pulich, Public Defender; street life near their Berkeley home, and intimate portraits of her family. As her health continued to decline, Lange worked with curator John Szarkowski, organizing the first major exhibition of her work that opened at the Museum of Modern Art a few months after her death from esophageal cancer in 1965.

Additional Information:

The Great Depression and the Farm Security Administration

The following historic information is provided to help viewers consider the context in which the Farm Security Administration Photographs were made.

The Dust Bowl

The stock market crash of 1929 coupled with an extreme drought, increasingly mechanized farming, poor farming practices, and violent dust storms in the early 1930s caused many Great Plains farms to become unworkable. Close to 500,000 farming families fled their homes and migrated to warm climates like Texas, Florida, and California in search of any work they might find including picking seasonal crops. Living in their cars or improvised shelters, under desperate conditions that were often not much better than what they left behind, they were often negatively stereotyped as "Okies," referring to the approximately 20% who came from Oklahoma.

The New Deal

After his inauguration in 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched his New Deal, a series of reforms that aimed to bring the country out of the Great Depression by stabilizing the economy and providing government jobs for the unemployed and relief for the impoverished. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) employed more than 8.5 million people building bridges, roads, public buildings, parks and airports. It also employed artists to create murals and sculpture for public places, host performances and exhibitions and teach classes in the community. Legislation to reduce child labor, protect workers rights and provide a safety net for the poor was also passed. Partly in response to photographs showing the plight of migrant workers made by Lange and others, the government established camps with basic shelter and clean running water near large farms. They also instructed farmers on land conservation practices and provided loans to tenant farmers for the purchase of land.

When military spending dramatically increased as America prepared for World War II in 1940, more jobs became available and the need for these programs diminished. Some reforms of the era including the Social Security Act and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), that insures bank deposits, remain.

The WPA Photographers

In 1935 the federal government formed the Resettlement Administration (later renamed the Farm Security Administration) that oversaw a variety of programs that attempted to alleviate rural poverty. Paul Taylor and Dorothea Lange and others including Walker Evans, Arthur Rothstein, Gordon Parks, Ben Shahn, Carl Mydans, Russell Lee, Marion Post Wolcott, and Jack Delano worked under the direction of Roy Stryker for the historical section of the FSA. Their goal was to create and promote a record of America during the Great Depression, in part to help explain and justify the need for New Deal programs. They photographed average people at home, work and play. Stryker gave the photographers basic topics to photograph such as food, home, leisure, the work environment, religion, transportation, commerce, and vernacular art. The photographers also collected extensive notes in the field that were used to create extensive captions for the images.

The WPA photographers also documented the ravaged landscape of the dust bowl, the plight of migrant workers and the unemployed as well as deplorable living conditions of the urban poor in places like Washington D.C. As the need for New Deal programs lessoned, many of these photographers worked for the Office of War Information where they documented America's mobilization for World War II and other war efforts including the internment of Japanese Americans.

The Impact of the FSA Photographers

"I am a photographer hired by a democratic government to take pictures of its land and its people. The idea is to show New York to Texans and Texas to New Yorkers."

-Russell Lee

We live in a culture that is inundated with imagery. It is hard to imagine a time in our history when New Yorkers might not know what Texas looked like and vise versa, but in America of the 1930s, before television and the internet and with fewer images in general circulation, this would have been true. At the time they were made, the FSA photographs were published in *Life*, *Look*, and *Survey Graphic* magazines and shared in public meetings. They played a critical role in showing Americans not only the effects of the Great Depression but also what their country looked like and how their fellow citizens lived. This was a documentary project of unprecedented scale that resulted in an invaluable historic record--the archive of over 160,000 images created by the FSA photographers is now housed by the Library of Congress and accessible to the public at the Library of Congress website www.loc.gov.

The FSA photographers knew that in telling the stories of their time, they needed to create images that would impact and appeal to the emotions of viewers. This project was in part a public relations campaign. Toward this end, the photographers and editors often selected subjects and images that would garner wide public appeal and sympathy at a time when America was very segregated by race and class. This is likely a factor in why images such as *Migrant Mother*, which depicts a (seemingly) "white" woman, who is identified as a widow and mother, became icons of the era. Ironically, the woman in this image, Florence Owens, was later identified as being Native American. Like most historic accounts, the archive of FSA photographs favors the histories of certain groups over others.

The FSA photographers also sometimes arranged people or details within the scenes that they photographed to create more powerful compositions. This raises questions about the "truthfulness" of documentary photographs. Today many people believe that it is unethical for documentary photographers to intervene at all in the situations they photograph. In the early 1930s when Dorothea Lange began photographing the effects of the Great Depression, the terms "documentary photography" and "photojournalism" did not yet exist. Prior to the FSA, a select few photographers--including Matthew Brady and Timothy O'Sullivan, who documented the Civil War and Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine who exposed the dire circumstances of America's poor—had used photography with the intention of creating a historic record or as a tool of social reform. The FSA photographers influenced the development of the fields of documentary photography and photojournalism and initiated discussions on the truthfulness of photography that continue today.

Jack Kerouac and Robert Frank

In 1955-57, Swiss émigré and photographer Robert Frank took multiple road trips around the US and using a small hand-held 35mm camera, photographed American post-war culture in places such as pool halls, diners, and on the street. He edited the over 20,000 images he took down to 83 gritty, grainy, and painstakingly-sequenced black-and-white images that were published in 1958 as the book, *The Americans*. His critical and highly influential vision examined issues such as divisions of class, race, and power in America through symbols such as the flag, jukeboxes, cars, and the road. In an era characterized in the mainstream media by domestic peace and comfort, Frank's Americans appear alienated, bored, and restless. The Beat poets including Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac felt an affinity with Frank's outsider and radical perspective.

Jack Kerouac wrote the introduction to the 1959 American publication of Robert Frank's *The Americans* just two years after his own *On the Road* was published. Both books would become internationally influential, both because of their highly personal style and form, and, especially for younger people, because they challenged contemporary idealization of American culture. Frank and Kerouac collaborated on two additional projects: a 1958 road trip to Florida supported by *Life* Magazine and later published by *The Evergreen Review*, and the 1959 film *Pull My Daisy* by Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie that Kerouac narrated.

In pre-Interstate days being on the road was slower, more winding, less abstract, and punctuated by real towns rather than rest stops. Most of the hundreds of thousands of migrants to California who used Route 66 (begun in 1926 and fully paved in 1938) to escape flood and drought during the Great Depression did not carry cameras. But they were followed by people who did, first to document the exodus, like the Farm Security Administration photographers, and later to revisit and explore the effects, and remnants, of this massive national disruption, like Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand and others. Kerouac notes in his "On the Road to Florida" text, "I was amazed to see how a photographic artist does the bit, of catching those things about the American Road writers write about."

At first, Frank's *The Americans* was not well received by the photography community. It was produced, after all, during the Ansel Adams era of the perfect print and Nature wonderfully seen. It was also the McCarthy era, with the perceived threat to American values by Communist infiltration. Bruce Downes, an editor for Popular Photography, wrote in May, 1960:

"Ugliness can be shocking, it can have impact—like a man spitting in your face: but it can also be given beauty by a sensitive photographer. Frank is sensitive, but apparently he is without love. There is no pity in his images. They are images of hate and hopelessness, of desolation and pre-occupation with death. They are images of an America seen by a joyless man who hates the country of his adoption. Is he a poet as Kerouac, his friend, says he is? Maybe. But he is also a liar, perversely basking in the kind of world and the kind of misery he is perpetually seeking and persistently creating. It is a world shrouded in an immense gray tragic boredom. This is Robert Frank's America. The book seems to me a mean use to put a camera to."

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On the Road: The Farm Security Administration Photographers Dorothea Lange Robert Frank

Questions for Looking and Discussion

- 1. Look carefully at each photograph or series of work on view:
 - Describe what you see.
 - What can you tell about how this image was made?
 - What do we learn about the people or place in the photograph?
 - What details reveal this information?

Also consider:

- Who made this photograph?
- For what purpose?
- Can you tell how they feel about this subject matter?
- What can you find out about this work was presented or distributed in the era in which it was made?
- **2.** All of the works in this exhibition could be considered documentary photographs—they were intended to tell the story of a time, place, or group of people.
 - What connections do you see between the bodies of work on view?
 - How do they differ?
 - Can a documentary photograph be "truthful?" How can photographs be misleading?

Migrant Mother

- **3.** *Migrant Mother*, Dorothea Lange's 1936 photograph of Florence Owens and her children became the iconic face of the Great Depression and helped to shape our view of that era. It is also one of the most widely reproduced and recognized photographs in the history of photography.
 - Why? Why do you think this photograph appeals so strongly to people of various generations and differing backgrounds?
- **A.** Lange took five frames of the scene that day. Look carefully at each of the frames of Migrant Mother on view.
 - Consider what each separate image communicates about this woman and her children.
 - Why do you think that Dorothea Lange and her boss Roy Stryker chose the tightly framed image of the woman, Florence Owens, with her hand resting on her face to represent this scene? Why do you think this frame—and not one of the other four--became famous over time?
 - Can you think of any other images or art works that remind you of *Migrant Mother*? Describe.

B. This photograph came to be known as *Migrant Mother*. The caption that Lange originally wrote to accompany the image that seldom does today is:

Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged 32, the father is a native Californian. Destitute in a pea pickers camp because of the failure of the early pea crop. These people had just sold their tent in order to buy food. Most of the 2,500 people in this camp were destitute. Nipomo, California.

- How does your perception of this image and of this woman change when you have this additional information?
- C. Some scholars believe that Lange may have provided some direction to her subjects when she made images including *Migrant Mother*.
 - If she had, would the image be less truthful? Why or why not?

4. Look carefully at Robert Frank's book The Americans.

- What themes or symbols does Frank repeatedly use in his visual description of America?
- How are Frank's images alike? Create a list of at least ten words that describe his photographic style.

Frank conceived of his project as a book and carefully considered the selection and sequencing of images.

- What do you notice about the sequencing of the images? How does it affect the construction of meaning in the book?
- Based on what we see in these photographs, what does this book communicate about America in the 1950s?

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On the Road: The Farm Security Administration Photographers Dorothea Lange Robert Frank

Activities

1. Research and Report: Migrant Labor in America

A. Who were the migrant agricultural workers of America in the 1930s?

- Where did they come from?
- What issues did they face?
- **B.** Who are the migrant agricultural workers in America today?
 - Where do they come from?
 - What are some of the issues that they face?

C. What issues have changed for migrants working in these two eras? What have stayed the same?

2. Documenting the Great Issues of our Time

A. Farm Security Administration photographers of the 1930s and early 40s used photography to record and respond to great issues of their time such as joblessness, homelessness, and natural and man-made disasters.

- What are some of the major political and humanitarian issues of our time?
- If you were to select one of these issues to document through photography, what would you photograph?
- What places, people, or details would you show to tell the story?

B. Gathering information and writing captions to accompany their images was an important part of the work of the FSA photographers.

• What if any supplemental information would you include any supplemental information with your photographs? Explain.

3. Working in the Style of Robert Frank

While Robert Frank made the images that comprise the book *The Americans* spontaneously, he sought to photograph scenes and situations that reflected his personal interests and concerns, many of which were shared by others in the counter culture of 1950s America. *The Americans* can be viewed as a document that captures the mood of a community and issues significant to a certain group within a specific generation and moment in history.

A. What issues and ideas are of interest to you and your peers? Strategize how you might create a series of photographs that could illustrate your concerns and interests and those of your peers. Seek out scenes and situations that might help to illuminate those issues and carefully compose your images so that the details within the images add to the telling of the story and create visual interest.

- **B.** Frank shot thousands of frames for his series but edited them down to the few he felt were the strongest visually and that best illustrated his ideas. He conceived of this project in the form of a book so he also sequenced his images in an order that created visual and conceptual relationships among the images and helped to move his loose narrative along.
- **C.** Edit your images. Which ones did you select or leave out? Why? Would you like your images to be viewed in a book, exhibited on a wall, in a slideshow, or? Organize your photographs into the type of presentation and order that you think suits them best. Share them with your peers and get feedback on the work.

4. Writing about Photographs

Write a story form the point of view of one of the people in one of the photographs on view. Or, write a dialogue between two people within a photograph. Use details from within the scene in your story.

- To get started, consider what you would see, smell, hear, think, or feel if you were in this scene.
- What is your relationship to the people or things around you?
- What might have happened before or after this picture was taken?

Vocabulary

photojournalism

Telling a story primarily through photographs and distributing it through print, broadcast, or web-based media

documentary photography

A photographic project, often long-term or in depth in scope, that is intended to convey a message to an audience.

icon

An important and enduring symbol.

migrant

(noun) A traveler who moves from one region or country to another.

(adjective) Habitually moving from place to place especially in search of seasonal work.

refugee

A person who flees for refuge or safety.

style

A way of expressing something that is characteristic of a particular person or group of people or period

Illinois State Learning Standards Addressed in this Curriculum

This Framing Ideas Curriculum connects with the curricular framework of the Chicago Public Schools: Chicago Guide for Teaching and Learning in the Arts. Each unit of study that explores different genres of photography and writing addresses the four strands of the guide, including: Art Making, Arts Literacy, Interpretation and Evaluation and Making Connections.

ILLINOIS STATE GOAL 1: Read with understanding and fluency.

1.C: Comprehend a broad range of reading materials.

Middle School-1.C.3e Compare how authors and illustrators use text and art across materials to express their ideas (e.g., foreshadowing, flashbacks, color, strong verbs, language that inspires).

Early High School-1.C.4e Analyze how authors and illustrators use text and art to express and emphasize their ideas (e.g., imagery, multiple points of view).

Late High School-1.C.5e Evaluate how authors and illustrators use text and art across materials to express their ideas (e.g., complex dialogue, persuasive techniques).

STATE GOAL 2: Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras and ideas.

Elementary -2.A.2b Describe how literary elements (e.g., theme, character, setting, plot, tone, conflict) are used in literature to create meaning.

Middle School -2.A.3d Identify ways that an author uses language structure, word choice and style to convey the author's viewpoint.

Early High School-2.A.4d Describe the influence of the author's language structure and word choice to convey the author's viewpoint .

Late High School-2.A.5d Evaluate the influence of historical context on form, style and point of view for a variety of literary works.

STATE GOAL 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

3.B. Compose well-organized and coherent writing for specific purposes and audiences.

Elementary-3.B.2a Generate and organize ideas using a variety of planning strategies (e.g., mapping, outlining, drafting).

Middle School-3.B.3a Produce documents that convey a clear understanding and interpretation of ideas and information and display focus, organization, elaboration and coherence

Early High School-3.B.4a Produce documents that exhibit a range of writing techniques appropriate to purpose and audience, with clarity of focus, logic of organization, appropriate elaboration and support and overall coherence.

Late High School-.B.5 Using contemporary technology, produce documents of publication quality for specific purposes and audiences; exhibit clarity of focus, logic of organization, appropriate elaboration and support and overall coherence.

FINE ARTS STATE GOAL 25: Know the language of the arts.

A. Understand the sensory elements, organizational principles and expressive qualities of the arts.

FINE ARTS STATE GOAL 26: Through creating and performing, understand how works of art are produced.

A. Understand processes, traditional tools and modern technologies used in the arts.

Elementary-26.A.1e Visual Arts: Identify media and tools and how to use them in a safe and responsible manner when painting, drawing and constructing.

Middle School -26.A.2e Visual Arts: Describe the relationships among media, tools/technology and processes.

Early High School-26.A.3e Visual Arts: Describe how the choices of tools/technologies and processes are used to create specific effects in the arts.

Late High School-26.A.4e Visual Arts: Analyze and evaluate how tools/technologies and processes combine to convey meaning.

FINE ARTS STATE GOAL 27: Understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

A. Analyze how the arts function in history, society and everyday life.

SOCIAL SCIENCES STATE GOAL 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations

A. Apply the skills of historical analysis and interpretation

Elementary-16.A.2b Compare different stories about a historical figure or event and analyze differences in the portrayals and perspectives they present.

Middle School -16.A.3b Make inferences about historical events and eras using historical maps and other historical sources

Early High School-16.A.4b Compare competing historical interpretations of an event. **Late High School-**16.A.5b Explain the tentative nature of historical interpretations.

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