

# Introducing Americans to America

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Group Documentary

Process Paper: 500 words

## Process Paper

### Introducing Americans to America

The inspiration for our group's 2016 National History Day project initially came while browsing the internet for topics relating to the New Deal and the Great Depression era. While researching, we kept on encountering photographs from the iconic Farm Security Administration (FSA) photography project. The distinct visual appeal these photographs conveyed seemed to tell a story of their own and reflected life of rural America during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl era. Our group decided to pursue this topic because of our fascination with the FSA photography project's ability to accurately capture the daily lives of the most impoverished Americans during a time of great adversity in our nation's history.

Finding primary and secondary sources for our project started with the exploration of various online archives and books, then evolved into conducting live interviews with University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill history professors, as well as traveling to The Library of Congress where the original FSA photographs are housed. Our interviews with emeritus professor of history, Dr. Filene and the leading expert on Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Dr. Leuchtenburg were significant because they shared their own personal stories and viewpoints on the FSA photography project. The information they provided drastically improved our understanding of the significance of the photography project. During our visit to The Library of Congress in Washington D.C., we were able to handle and view the original photographs from the FSA photography project. There were aisles of filing cabinets where photographs were organized by geographic region. Within each region, there were numerous subcategories; for

example, under the “Midwest” region, subcategories including corn, fences, barber shops, and schools were listed alphabetically. Having access to the online archival records and photographs held in the Library of Congress were our most valuable resource, due to the visual impact the photographs had on us and our project.

With the FSA photography project's powerful visual appeal, our group felt as though a documentary would be the best way to present our research. Our group was inspired by the FSA photographers task of setting out across the nation to document rural American lives while also exposing the impoverished living conditions to the rest of the nation and believed that using a visual medium to educate others on the photography project’s lasting impact on America would be most effective. We knew that the purpose of the photographs were to enlighten others, and what better way to do so than displaying as many of the photographs within a 10 minute time period?

Our project relates to the 2016 National History Day theme of “Exploration, Encounter, and Exchange” in many ways. The FSA photographers embarked on a journey to explore and document rural America. While doing so, they encountered political challenges, such as Congress cutting their funding. Despite these challenges, the FSA photography project came to be the largest federal government sponsored pictorial record in American history and encouraged an exchange of ideas as to how the government could better provide for its citizens.