

Freedom Found On A Bootheel Roadside: The 1939 Sharecroppers Strike

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Why We Chose Our Topic

We chose to do our topic on the 1939 Sharecropper's Strike because we wanted to do something that not only fit the theme, but was also locally related and important. We searched for local history that fit the theme and found that the strike was a perfect fit for Breaking Barriers in History. We live and go to school surrounded by farm fields, both of our families are involved in farming and agriculture, this seemed like something interesting and fitting for us to do.

How We Conducted Our Research

We began looking at websites that gave an overview of the strike and then narrowed in on websites that were more specific. We looked at a couple of sites dedicated to the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and sites that were specifically about Owen Whitfield and sharecropping. We found information in digital archives and also searched our library for books related to the strike.

Why We Chose Our Category and Constructed Our Project

We chose to do a documentary because we had both done one before as individuals and had success at the district and state level so we thought it would be a good idea to combine our experience and work ethic and do a project together. We felt that a documentary could illustrate the emotion and feelings of the sharecroppers during the strike which might help the viewer make a connection to the topic. We built our project by constructing a storyboard after we completed most of our research. From there we search for video and photographs that we could use during certain parts of the video. We divided it up with subheadings to help contain the information and tell the story.

How Our Topic Fits the Theme

The 1939 Sharecroppers Strike broke barriers of race by having a combined strike of whites and blacks, together striking on the road for the same cause. They understood that if

they wanted to have any success they would have to be unified in their efforts. Another racial barrier was broken when a prominent white farmer that sympathized with the strikers named Thad Snow stepped in to advise and help Owen Whitfield during the strike. The largest barrier broken was that for the first time in the region, the federal government stepped in to help sharecroppers find a place to live. They bought ground from private owners and created government funded communities with low income housing that allowed the sharecroppers to have a home while searching for a way to make a living. President Roosevelt also altered his Farm Security Administration to include direct assistance for sharecroppers and not just landowners.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

“Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives:

Search Results.” *Library of Congress*,

www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?sp=4&co=fsa&st=grid.

This website on the Library of Congress contained an immense number of photographs that were instrumental in the creation of our documentary.

“Forced Evictions of Sharecroppers-1939.” *Georgia State University Library*,

exhibits.library.gsu.edu/current/exhibits/show/health-is-a-human-right/displacement/forceD-evictions-of-sharecropp.

This website contains photographs of sharecroppers during the 1939 Sharecroppers Strike. These photos helped us understand the sharecroppers

Kester, Howard. *Revolt among Sharecroppers*. Arno Press, 1969.

This book is a primary source because it was originally published in 1936, but it was republished in 1969. This book gave us information on the appalling treatment of sharecroppers in the 1930s. It helped us understand the drastic measures that needed to be taken by the sharecroppers in order for their way of life to be changed.

Lee, Russell. “Sharecropper Family in Living Room of Shack Home. La Forge Project, Missouri.”

The Library of Congress, May 1938, www.loc.gov/item/2017781119/.

This website was used for a photograph of inside a sharecroppers home.

Viewing photographs such as this one helped us understand what the lives of sharecroppers and their children must have been like.

National Register of Historic Places Nomination. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. "Delmo Community Center," 5 Dec. 2008. Web. https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/afam/2010/delmo_community_center.pdf

This source contains a lot of specific information about the Delmo program and the different communities that were created by this program. It was specific about how many houses were built and the number of families that were helped.

Poplar Bluff Republican, "1000 Sharecroppers Make Trek To Roads," 12 Jan. 1939.

Newspapers.com. Web. Accessed 12 Feb. 2020.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/581154672/?terms=sharecroppers>

This source was helpful for information because it was from a period newspaper, we also used this source for a pic of newspaper heading.

Roll, Jarod. "Out Yonder on the Road," *Southern Spaces*. 16 March 2010. Web.

<https://southernspaces.org/2010/out-yonder-road-working-class-self-representation-and-1939-roadside-demonstration-southeast-missouri/>

This source has a collection of photographs from the State Historical Society of Missouri that were a high enough resolution to use on our website. Most of the photographs were only available online through this site.

Rothstein, Arthur. "Meeting of Sharecroppers Who Have Been Evicted from Plantation and Now Live in a Temporary Camp. Many of These Participated in the Highway Demonstration of January 1939. Butler County, Missouri." *The Library of Congress*, Jan. 1939, www.loc.gov/resource/fsa.8b19278/.

This photograph, taken by Arthur Rothstein, was taken of a family of sharecroppers.

Snow, Thad. "Thad Snow Papers." *The State Historical Society of Missouri*. 1926-1954. <https://collections.shsmo.org/manuscripts/capegirardeau/cg0027.pdf>

This website was used to get specific information about Thad Snow and the role that he played in the 1939 Sharecroppers Strike.

"Southern Tenant Farmers Union Records on Microfilm." *Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives*, Cornell University Library, rnc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/KCL05204mf.html.

This source contains the records kept by the STFU from 1932 to 1971. There are specific references to the strike in southeast Missouri in 1939, and the STFU was against it.

Secondary Sources

Anderson, Carol. "Missouri Sharecroppers Strike of 1939." *The Hidden History of the Quest for Civil Rights on Apple Podcasts*, Emory University, 7 Feb. 2012, podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-hidden-history-of-the-quest-for-civil-rights/id501059668.

This video, featuring Carol Anderson, a professor of African American Studies at

Emory University, was an amazing source of information. Anderson did a wonderful job of explaining the background of sharecropping leading up to the strike of 1939, which helped us have a better understanding of this topic and its Importance.

Croessman, John H. "In 1939, Rev. Owen Whitfield of Du Quoin Led the Storied Missouri Sharecroppers Protest; Family Members to Re-Enact Protest Saturday, Jan. 11." *Du Quoin Evening Call*, 2 Jan. 2014, www.duquoin.com/article/20140102/news/701223216/.

This newspaper article contains a lot of information on Rev. Owen Whitfield and his part in the strike. It contains information on the location of the strike as well as information on the government policy which enabled the tenant farmers to keep the money owed to sharecroppers for their labor.

Grubbs, Donald. *Cry from the Cotton The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal*. University of Arkansas Press, 2017.

This book goes into detail about the founding of the STFU and its leadership. We learned that the STFU developed into the Farm Security Administration, which gives aid to people in rural communities who are struggling financially.

Mitchell, Steve. "Homeless, Homeless Are We..." *Preservation Issues* online. Volume 3(1). arch.law.wustl.edu/Staff/Taylor/preserv/v3n1/homeless.htm.

This site contained pictures and information specific to the Delmo housing

program. This helped us understand the importance of the Delmo houses to the sharecroppers.

Stepenoff, Bonnie. *Thad Snow: a Life of Social Reform in the Missouri Bootheel*.

University of Missouri Press, 2003.

This biography of Thad Snow shared a lot of insight into his life with us. This book was a good source because it helped us understand how he ended up meeting Owen Whitfield and helping the sharecroppers with their strike.

