

TEACHER'S GUIDE
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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

Account of Farming Practices in Oklahoma

Byrd Monford Morgan was born in 1924 in Oklahoma. His family moved to California when he was in sixth grade and leased a farm in Madera County during the Depression. In this oral history (recorded in 1981), Morgan describes how farming practices helped cause the Dust Bowl in the Great Plains.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit more about the farming practices? I heard that most of the farmers in Oklahoma at that time didn't practice crop rotation.

Morgan: They didn't practice crop rotation. They didn't seem to realize that they were losing the top soil by not terracing on slopes to keep it from washing away. I've seen great gulches and ravines washed down at the ends of the fields that came to too much of a drop in elevation. Lots of top soil washed away. In the western part of the country that had happened. They'd farmed the same thing too many years in a row. When the drought did come the wind blew the top soil away. If the wheat doesn't grow the dirt just gets powdery and then the wind blows it away. You have a lot of wind in that country and just because you have drought years it doesn't mean that you can't have a downpour occasionally. In that latitude you have a lot of violent weather where your southern and northern climates clash at certain times of the year. You can have a downpour of four or five inches of rain in two or three hours and still be drought year.

Interviewer: But you feel that because of the farming methods when the winds came they did lose a lot of the top soil?

Morgan: Oh, definitely. They should never have grown cotton in Oklahoma in the first place. Cotton is very hard on soil. It takes pretty good land to start out with. They'd start raising cotton just year after year.

Source: "Interview with Byrd Monford Morgan," California State College, Bakersfield - *California Odyssey: The 1930s Migration to the South San Joaquin Valley*, pg. 11
http://www.csub.edu/library/_files/DB_files/Morgan131Rev.pdf

