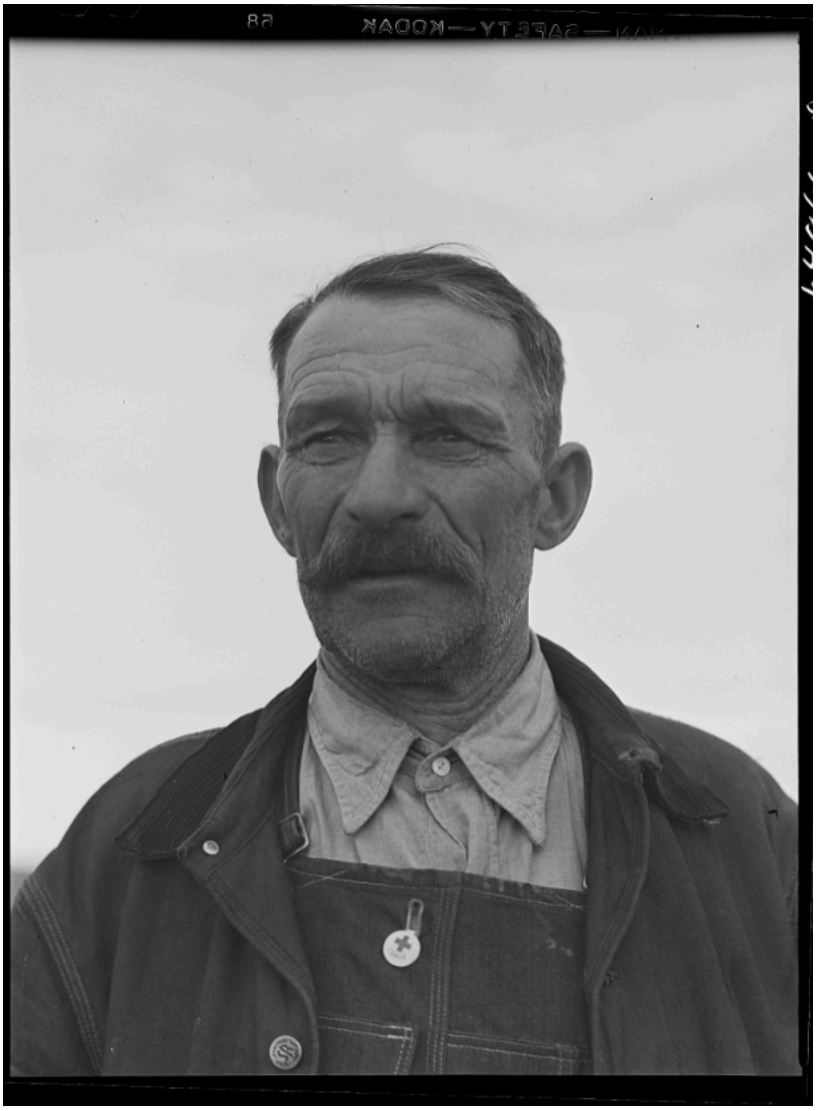
Homesteading in the United States

Created by: Savannah Deuter



Benjamin & Miranda Shreve Homestead (Foreground)

1933, Big Horn County, MT, camera film negative. Note the homestead in the lower left and the railroad and grain elevator near the horizon.



McCone County, Montana. Russian-born Homesteader and Dry Land Farmer

March 1942, Antelope, MT, camera film negative.

Contextual Paragraph

Through several legislative actions, predominated by the Homestead Act of 1862, homesteaders were incentivized to expand westward with their families. Many of those who moved westward were immigrants from countries where land ownership was inaccessible for the average citizen and was a right often reserved to wealthier classes. With the promise of land from the U.S. government to anyone who was able to settle and produce on a 160-acre plot, many immigrants were inspired to do so. Montana was one of the last places to be homesteaded and settled, and while many lots were claimed in the mid to late 1800s in other parts of the country, Montana was still issuing claims far into the 1920s. During the entirety of this exodus westward, natives were continually displaced and pushed off land promised to them by the U.S. government. In 1978, all remaining unclaimed lots were placed in federal ownership with the intent of being held in public trust for the people of the United States. Federal agencies such as BLM (Bureau of Land Management) and the U.S. Forest Service currently manage these public lands.

Key Questions

1. Look at the homestead in the lower corner of the first picture. Does it look to be abandoned or inhabited? Why might this be?
2. Why would Montana be settled later in history than the rest of the U.S.?
3. Why would immigrants be incentivized to move west?

Assessment

1. If this land is being held by the government for the people of the United States, does that include native nations, and does that imply that they should receive land to make up for what was taken from them? Why or why not?
2. In 1978, a new act was passed that virtually ceased homesteading in most of the United States. Why do you think the U.S. government did so?