The Curious REPort

An inside look at Mother Road

"This beautifully woven tale of the many sides of America, the American Dream, and what it means to be a family is as captivating as it is challenging."
-DCmetrotheaterarts.com

For Tickets

619.544.1000

sdrep.org

Discounts available for students, seniors & military

THANK YOU TO OUR SEASON 46 SPONSORS:

Larry Alldredge
and Dawn Moore

Joan and
Irwin Jacobs

Harvey Neiman

SD Commission for Arts and Culture

THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

THE CONRAD PREBYS FOUNDATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This In-Depth Guide was prepared by Rebecca Ojeda, MA. She wrote the provocative articles seen within. Literary Manager Danielle Ward served as editor.

Cover art is by Studio Conover. Layout and design is by Angelynne Pawaan.

San Diego Repertory Theatre would like to thank the following for their generous support: City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture, County of San Diego,
California Arts Council—a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts

WHAT WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT...

Bringing you a new twist on an American classic, building on the long-standing relationship between playwright Octavio Solis and our Artistic Director Sam Woodhouse.

Octavio Solis is one of the most prominent Latinx playwrights in our country. San Diego REP has produced three of his plays over the last two decades and is thrilled to bring his voice back to our stage. His new work, Mother Road, revisits the epic journey started in Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath, but in reverse: bringing unlikely members of the family home to Oklahoma to continue the tradition of family-centered farming.

In Steinbeck's novel, the Joad family, along with other dispossessed migrant families, make their way west from drought-stricken Oklahoma searching for work. They encounter many challenges along the way: hunger, car problems, police harassment, exploitation by employers, and hostility from locals. Fast forward to today. One could write a similar struggle from the perspective of current migrant farmworkers. Solis, however, doesn't just retell us the same story set in a different historical period, he sets up a confrontation of ideas by matching an older white Oklahoma farmer with a younger Latinx farmer in California.

We echo what Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Artistic Director Bill Rauch said of this play: "Octavio's work is rooted in the same moral outrage about economic injustice that makes *Grapes of Wrath* an American classic. It also brilliantly activates this theme in a contemporary context, conveying the fears and the glorious promise of the particular moment in the United States as we transition from a white majority to a society that will soon be majority people of color." This type of work is at the center of what San Diego REP does.

We are also thrilled to highlight a story filled with a diverse cast of characters: Latinx, Black, White, Native American, and LGBTQIA+ that shape what America looks like today and draws the parallels between the farmworkers of yesterday with those doing that necessary work today. *Mother Road* is also an ideal play for us to produce because we often seek classic stories told in a fresh, modern way. In the past, such plays have included: Luis Alfaro's *Oedipus El Rey*, Lucas Hnath's *A Doll's House, Part 2*, and Herbert Siguenza's *El Henry* as well as his *Manfiest Destinitis.* This play will be directed by Sam Woodhouse, whose family is from Oklahoma. So there is a circle of completion that is at work between Octavio and Sam working together again as well as Sam working towards a journey that takes him and his team back towards his roots.

Danielle Ward, REP Literary Manager & Artistic Associate Director

MISSION

San Diego Repertory Theatre produces intimate, provocative, inclusive theatre. We promote an interconnected community through vivid works that nourish progressive political and social values and celebrate the multiple voices of our region. San Diego Repertory Theatre feeds the curious soul.

INTERESTING TIDBITS

Did you know...

John Steinbeck, author of *The Grapes of Wrath*

What is an "Okie"?

"Okies" are people from Oklahoma and other Mid to South Western states who traveled to California in hopes of escaping the debilitating effects of the Dust Bowl. At the beginning of its original use, the term "Okie" referred to a person from the state of Oklahoma. During the Great Depression, it was used as a derogatory slang term for someone from Oklahoma and other midwestern and southwestern states who traveled to California for work in hopes of escaping the debilitating effects of the Dust Bowl. The migrant workers from these states were desperate to find better lives for their families and were eager to work at any job they could to make ends meet in a new land. This made current labor-seeking workers in California upset to see jobs being taken from non-Californians. Employers often employed Okies first because they were able to pay them less than Californians. To Californians, the term was used harshly towards many migrant people, making them feel discriminated against, unwelcome, and unvalued.

Steinbeck's Adaptations

Adaptations are essential to the theatre since the days of Shakespeare, where much of Shakespeare's work is adapted from Italian folktales and classic Greek plays. Famous musicals such as Hamilton and Fun Home were adapted from original novels. Throughout history, playwrights have had the chance to interpret other artists' work and experience the text through a theatrical lens. John Steinbeck was a pioneer of adaptations, particularly in the dramatic form of his literary works. His novel was initially written as a hybrid between a play and a book divided into three acts of Mice and Men. Steinbeck wrote this way again in his broadway shows, The Moon Is Down and Burning Bright, both were successful. His adaptive work was trailblazing in the early 20th century, which has inspired the dialogue of resilience and empathy found amid difficult roads located in *Mother Road*.

200 Okie Ballads Recorded in Labor Camps; U.S. to Get Them as 'Cultural Documentation'

A phonographic library of 200 folksongs and ballads that were written by Southern sharecroppers during their recent mass migration to the fruit orchards of California has been collected by two instructors at City College and will be presented to the Library of Congress, it was announced yesterday.

Following the trail described by John Steinbeck in "The Grapes of Wrath," Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin, members of the college's Public Speaking Department, visited seven Federal Migratory Labor Camps in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys of California

Paducah, Texas, who is working as a cotton picker, follows:

I am a rumbling cotton picker.
Happy as I can be.
Any old cotton patch
Is home sweet home to me.

I came out here from Texas
To the State of the Golden West,
My pop got on the WPA
Cause he thought that was the best.

So I'll go right back to Texas
And stay there all my life
I hope I'll meet me some pretty little girl
And I'll ask her to be my wife.

I'll try to make her happy,
I'll love her all the time;

Newspaper clipping derived from Library of Congress. Public Domain.

INTERESTING TIDBITS

Did you know...

"The Dust Bowl was the name given to the set of conditions that affected the Great Plains during the 1930s." Photo courtesy of National Geographic..

No human being is illegal

Like the term "Okie," phrases such as "illegal immigrant" and "illegal alien" tend to replace complex legal circumstances with the assumption of guilt, criminalizing the personhood of a migrant instead of describing the legality of their actions. Instead, the term 'undocumented' is less dehumanizing. It is not a crime for an undocumented person to remain in the United States, according to Justice Anthony Kennedy in the case of Arizona vs. the United States in 2012. It is a violation of federal immigration law to remain in the country with no legal authorization. Still, this violation is only punishable by civil penalties, not criminal penalties. As the "Okies" did, undocumented persons most often seek to provide a better life for their families.

"Musical Road Presented by This Lane" Photo by Trevor Cox from https://www.flickr.com/photos/trevorcoxsalford/7434989796

California's Musical Road

If you're a United States driver, you're probably familiar with the grooves that make loud, vibrating sounds when a car drives over the shoulder or centerline of the roadway, called rumble strips. While on most roads, these strips alert drivers when they are getting too close to the shoulder or opposing lane, some are built so that if a driver drives over them consistently at a certain speed, it will play a song!

One of these musical highways can be found in Lancaster, California. Along Avenue G between 30th and 40th Street West, a snippet of the song "William Tell Overture" by Gioachino Rossini plays for drivers going 55mph. This song was made popular with the theme song from The Lone Ranger.

INTERESTING TIDBITS

Did you know...

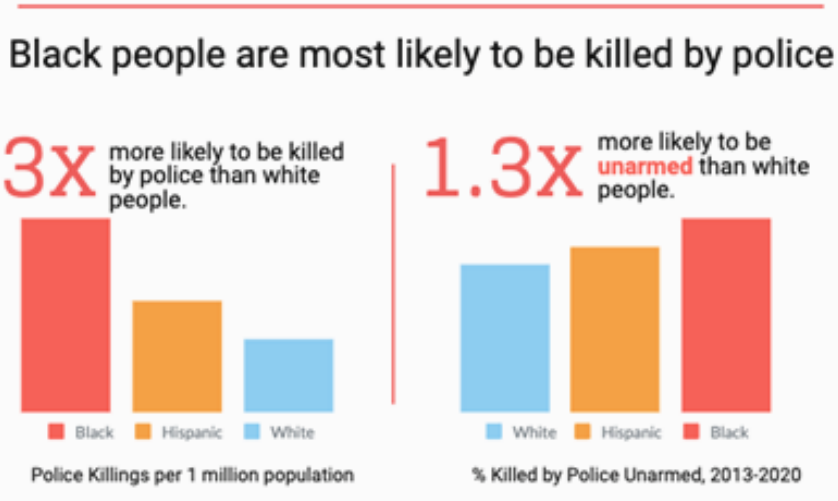
Cover of *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Grapes_of_Wrath.

The Grapes of Wrath Controversy

Despite its literary success, Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath was the subject of much controversy. Many communities banned or burned copies of the novel, citing its occasional obscene language and general themes. Some even called it communist propaganda, while agricultural groups who implemented the book's unfair labor practices brought to light called the book 'a pack of lies.'

Police Brutality: A National Issue

All of the characters in Mother Road deal with complex issues such as discrimination, homophobia, and police brutality. Today, at least three people are killed by police every day. This statistic seems to be on the rise each year. In 2020, Black people made up 28% of those killed by police, despite only making up 13% of the population. Below is an infographic regarding the likelihood of fatal police incidents, using the information found by the Mapping Police Violence database organization.



https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/

10 Thought-Provoking Ideas

#1 Route 66: The Mother Road

“66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the deserts' slow northward invasion...” -John Steinbeck

Octavio Solis was inspired to write Mother Road after a 12-day trek across Route 66, commemorating the 75th Anniversary of The Grapes of Wrath. He had been commissioned to write a piece for the inaugural Steinbeck Festival in 2014. He met a young man familiar with Steinbeck's novel after visiting the Arvin Migrants Camp, originally for displaced workers fleeing the Dust Bowl and now housing Mexican-American farmworkers. The young man said, "I am Tom Joad. This is a story about me. We, the people that live here are the new Okies. We are the new Okies. And this novel is about me, my life."

John Steinbeck first coined a nickname for Route 66, calling it the "Mother Road." He dedicated a whole chapter in The Grapes of Wrath to it, along with the American characteristic of migration.

U.S. Route 66, the "Mother Road," is one of the longest and oldest highways in the country. It was built in 1926 by the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads. It was a part of the country's first federal highway system, which relied on local, state, and national roads. Route 66 stretches 2,400 miles across eight states, starting in Chicago, Illinois, and moving through Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and finally ending in Santa Monica, California.

Route 66 was used as a migration route for Americans escaping the Dust Bowl by moving to California. This migration helped establish businesses, some of which are still in operation to this day. Before Route 66, traveling across the country was a challenging journey, for the roads were unpaved and dangerous to travelers.

In its early promotion, many had envisioned Route 66 as a road that would link towns across the nation together, transforming them into a travelers safe-haven, as the need for food, fuel, repairs, and temporary shelter boosted the economies of local communities. Roadside advertising and drive-in business such as fast food and motor inns became the norm because of Route 66 and increased merchandising development to the on-the-road consumer.

Given the increased popularity of Route 66, the road itself became overworked and lacked the necessary and proper maintenance. The heavy traffic, new safety requirements for vehicles, and improved roadway construction tools led to a new type of federal highway system built by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, called the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. This act created the Interstate Highway System, which replaced Route 66 with newer, safer, faster, wider highways either on top of the old road or parallel to them. Route 66 was formally decommissioned in the summer of 1985.

Today, portions of the famous roadway remain a popular road-trip destination for those wanting to learn more about America's heritage. In 1990, Congress deemed the route worthy of historical preservation, claiming that it symbolized the American people's heritage of travel and their legacy of seeking a better life.

The trip from Oklahoma to California brought music and songs to travelers and artists, with lyrics that depict and connect people's lived experiences to help us understand the humanity of those travelers.

In the next page, you can find a list of famous cities located along Route 66, along with some songs inspired by Route 66 throughout history. Sit back and take a listening journey...

Starting in Chicago, Illinois:
Route 66 by Chuck Berry

St. Louis, Missouri:
Wabash Cannonball by Roy Acuff

Springfield, Missouri:
Missouri Waltz by Johnny Cash

Tulsa, Oklahoma:
Tell Me Something Bad About Tulsa by George Strait

Armillo, Texas:
I've Been Everywhere by Johnny Cash

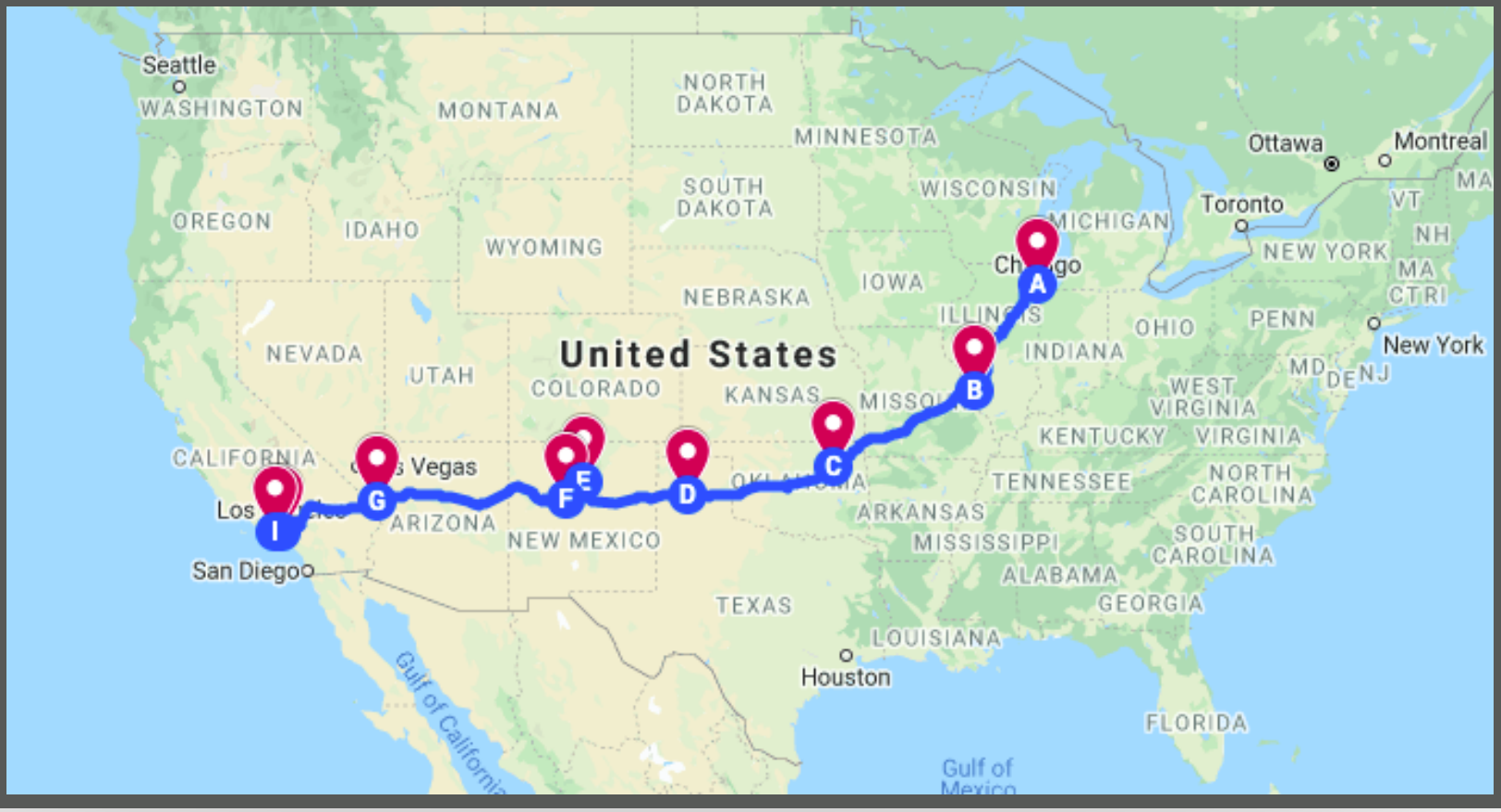
Sante Fe, New Mexico:
Sante Fe from the musical *RENT*

Albuquerque, New Mexico:
Albuquerque by Neil Young

Oatman, Arizona:
Tumbling Tumbleweeds by Roy Rogers & Sons of the Pioneers

Los Angeles, California:
I Love L.A. by Randy Newman

Ending in Santa Monica, California:
Route 66 TV Theme Song



The Mother Road, Route 66 Map Overview from https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1Wk9-TJBtNXVe1PEkxvtfgqc5Gfkkxr0S&ll=36.00045146908106%2C-91.81049552093307&z=4

#2 The Dust Bowl: An Ecological Disaster

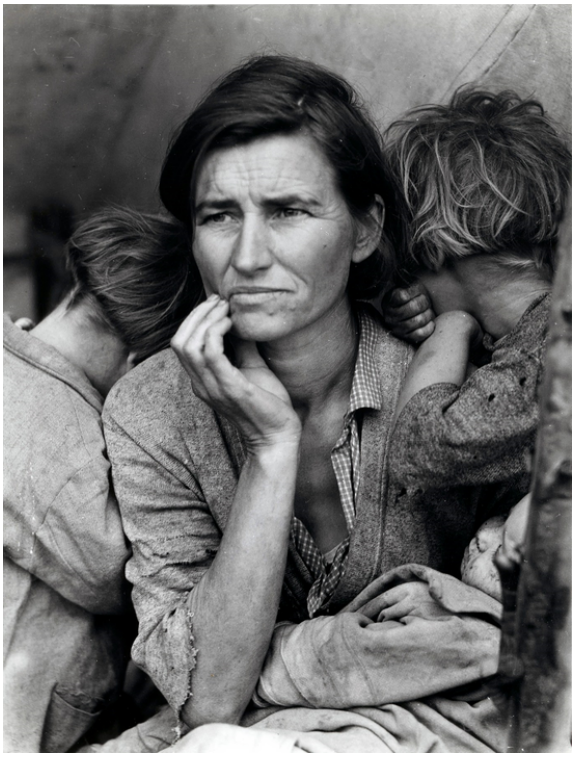
The Dust Bowl is still considered the greatest manufactured ecological disaster in American history. During World War I, the US government encouraged farmers in the Midwest to grow wheat. Because the land was cheap, millions of farmers removed native grasses that once weighted the soil down. Then, a severe drought consumed the ground, making rains scarce. Crops that were planted quickly died, leaving the earth exposed. Winds carried this soil away, resulting in dust storms, also known as "black blizzards." These storms towered up to two miles into the sky and spread up to 2,000 miles in width, affecting areas from the Great Plains to the East Coast, a total of 125 million acres of land.

These storms were so devastating to communities across the Midwest that farms could not sustain any crop growth, leading to a struggle for survival.

Not only was the impact devastating economically, but socially and physically as well. Many people and livestock alike suffered from respiratory illnesses, such as dust pneumonia, the "brown plague."

https://i0.wp.com/fdr.blogs.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2018/06/74-20263.jpg?w=1370

Nearly 500,000 Americans from Midwestern states such as New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma abandoned their homes. They escaped seeking new opportunities in California. They were victims of "climate displacement," a term describing a group of people forced to move from their previous homes due to ecological disasters resulting from climate change.



Migrant Mother by Dorothea Lange from https://i0.wp.com/fdr.blogs.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/17/2018/06/74-20263.jpg?w=1370

Amid the global Covid-19 Pandemic, between September 2020 and March of 2021, more than 10.3 million people were victims of climate displacement.

Today, California is often depicted as being vulnerable, suffering from a drought that has lasted over two decades caused by soaring temperatures, lack of precipitation, and toxic pesticides and fertilizers, which is similar to the ecological wasteland the Midwest experience during the Dust Bowl. California's drought has consumed nearly all of the state's counties, putting strain on the state's power grid amidst rising temperatures.

Learn more about California's Dust Bowl's effect by visiting the California State Capitol Museum's article on their website - The Dust Bowl, California, and the Politics of Hard Times: www.capitolmuseum.ca.gov.

Learn more about California's Dust Bowl's Effect:

www.capitolmuseum.ca.gov

#3 A Modern Theatre Chorus: A Journey's Witness

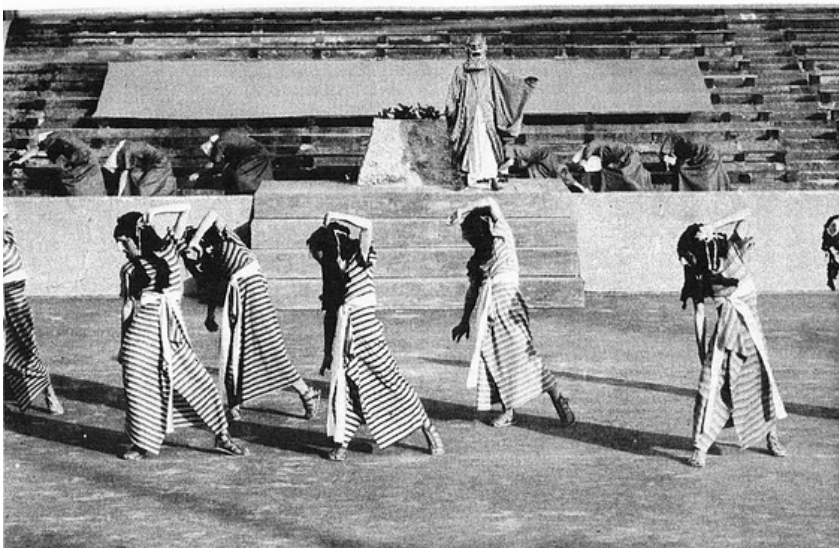
Octavio Solis originally wrote Mother Road as a poetic, choral-centered piece for the National Steinbeck Center Festival, collaborating with El Teatro Campesino. He later decided to expand the work into a full-scale play.

In both theatre and music, a choral piece uses a chorus or a group who perform together vocally instead of on their own. A chorus is a tool that has been used since the beginnings of theatre.

In Classical Greek theatre, a chorus was a group of 12-50 masked performers who spoke or sang their lines altogether as one unified performer, often providing background and summary information for audiences to help them understand the story. They would comment on themes, characters' secrets, fears, thoughts, and insights into the plot and world of the play.

One of the most profound instances of using the Greek chorus in contemporary plays—apart from Mother Road—includes Eugene O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra and Luis Alfaro's Electricidad and Oedipus El Rey. In these plays, the chorus plays a central role that is both structural and narrative, building on Latinx community and identity, connecting the play's more significant themes to sociopolitical issues of the now.

In Mother Road, the chorus is used in the traditional way of helping advance the plot and tell the story, sometimes talking directly to the audience regarding the action on stage. But Solis goes beyond this format, including chorus members as individual characters in scenes with the main characters.



Public Domain. Greek Tragedy 1968 chorus from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TUGTI-10-chorus.jpg

Utilizing their voices, bodies, and storytelling abilities, the chorus captivates the audience and characters in the world of the play through their performance. In Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Illuminations magazine, the chorus for Mother Road is described as "the guides, the travelers, witnesses, interpreters, propellers, ghosts, memory keepers, singers, and soundscape creators; they birth the characters." Thus, the chorus also represents the people and their being.

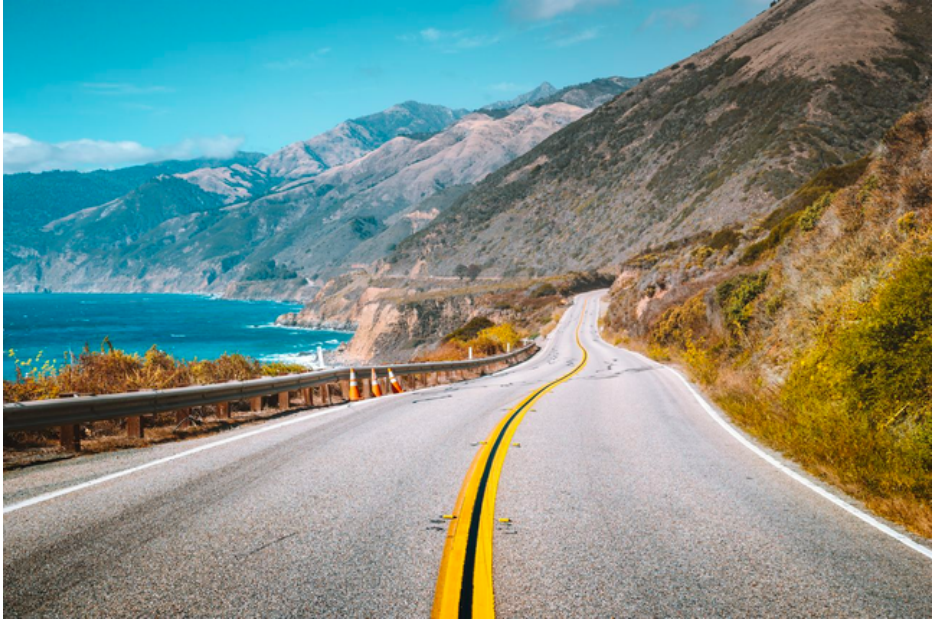
#4 The Itch In Our Shoes: The American Road Trip

“We are this urge, this urge to go, this itch in our shoes, to move, to ride, to find what will find us...” –The Chorus

Dearborn, Michigan is the home to the Henry Ford Museum, which features a gallery of cars throughout history, ranging back to the first automobile sold to the American people in 1909, the Ford Model T. Their exhibit, "Driving America," shows audiences the evolution of the American automobile from being a practical vehicle to a customized piece of machinery that defines life in America, while also analyzing the American auto industry's ever-changing culture, promises, and advertisements. In the 1960s, the Toyota Corona allowed global manufacturers to part in American car culture, making over 587,000 vehicles annually. These cars were more evolution of the American automobile from being a practical vehicle to a customized piece of machinery that defines life in America, while also analyzing the American auto industry's ever-changing culture, promises, and advertisements.

In the 1960s, the Toyota Corona allowed global manufacturers to part in American car culture, making over 587,000 vehicles annually. These cars were more economical for the typical American family, making driving for pleasure increasingly popular. Social events like car shows have been a testament to our love of the vehicles that give us the literal key to freedom. Driving for pleasure, however, was not always supported by all. In the 1980s, politicians and local businesses demanded that law enforcement crackdown on 'cruising,' which is the act of driving around aimlessly. Cruising was considered an inconvenience to those driving around running errands and commuting to and from work. Soon, cruising was banned in many counties across the country.

In the 2000s, the invention of electric and hybrid cars such as the Toyota Prius has allowed environmentally and economically conscious drivers to take road trips without the stress of gas prices or pollution.



https://images.wsj.net/im-196106?width=860&size=1.5&pixel_ratio=1

Our relationship with the automobile has changed over history. It will need to change depending on the needs of the consumer and society's push for innovation and dependency on technology. However, for now, many individuals and families take solace in the American road trip, with travel increasing since the Covid-19 pandemic.

More travelers now than ever have been utilizing the rental of Recreational Vehicles, or "RV" 's, through companies like RVshare, a marketplace similar to Airbnb, but for RV's to use at the traveler's discretion. RV rental usage has seen an increase in bookings by 650% since the spring of 2020. Renting an RV gives families and individuals the freedom of choice regarding accommodations, convenience, and comfort. Given the Covid-19 pandemic, many RV parks and campground owners have been using safety processes similar to hotels with protocols for cleaning, disinfecting, and maintaining social distancing.

According to a survey from American travelers from the company Harvest Hosts, over 76% of respondents said they plan to travel more than they did in 2020.

In another survey, more than two-thirds of Americans stated they do not feel safe flying. Over 50% of Americans said they did not see hotels as secure options, given the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of this, more travelers are opting to hit the open road for vacations and

Grand Teton National Park Van Life. Public Domain from https://www.reneeroaming.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Best-National-Park-Road-Trip-Itinerary-Grand-Teton-National-Park-Van-Life.jpg .

road trips. 99% of respondents said they feel safe traveling in an RV. This increased road travel has provided more of an opportunity for Americans to visit states and areas that they may not have seen otherwise. Last year, the most popular states to visit in RV's were California, Florida, Arizona, Texas, and Oregon. The magic of the American road trip is often rooted in our particular itch to travel, or as it is said in Mother Road, the 'itch in our shoes.' The itch to travel nowadays does not have to include taking a plane or train but can be as simple as getting behind the vehicle's wheel you may already own. To those who love to endure the endless hours hours in close quarters, the waves of telephone wires, and the countless rest stops and billboard advertisements, the road trip seems like the perfect vacation.

The road trip has a unique way of instilling into our lives the timeless phrase, "It's about the journey, not the destination." It gives us the unique opportunity to stop focusing on where we are going in life and reflect on what is along the way.

#5 Agriculture and Farming in America: A Farmer's Struggle

In the early 1900s, cotton was Oklahoma's leading money crop, with production increasing rapidly towards a value of about $61.8 million. To combat the economic struggles of the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) to help farmers across the nation. This program provided cash benefit payments to farmers who reduced their land size but did not help farmers who shared land between families, engaging in 'sharecropping,' also called tenant farmers. This left thousands of small family farmers who shared acreage with other families struggling to survive. This federal program helped some farmers financially.

The drought and dust storms of the mid-1930s caused conditions for farming to be drastically unlivable and physically dangerous. These dust storms destroyed farms across the Midwest, forcing farmers to flee to California and elsewhere. The farmers who chose to stay in Midwestern states were beneficiaries of the Rural Electrification Administration, established in 1935.

Because of this program, two-thirds of Oklahoma's farmers had electricity, running water, indoor plumbing, home freezers, refrigerators, and even electric washing machines by the 1950s. In the three decades following this program, farms dropped, while the remaining farms doubled to 500 acres. By the 1970s, large corporate farms capitalized on significant investments in tractors, mechanical cotton pickers, hay balers for farms in the state.

In the 1990s, wheat had become the leading commercial crop in Oklahoma, contributing to $900 million in exported profits. By the 21st

century, only a tiny percentage of Oklahoma residents lived on farms.

Today, the American agricultural sector is a multi-billion dollar industry, contributing to more than $150 billion in exports worldwide. America is home to 2.1 million farms across the continental United States, with 99% of them family-owned. The average size of these farms is 435 acres. The most profitable farms focus on one crop and often bring in over one million dollars a year. America's largest crop is corn, being the largest producer of it worldwide. Corn is grown in over 90 million acres of land in Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Iowa, and Nebraska. The second-largest crop in the United States is the Soybean.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service's Crop Production report, the soybean crop in the United States has yielded a lower production rate this year, producing about 66 million bushels lower than last year. Continued drought conditions and limited rainfall in Minnesota and North and South Dakotas contribute to this trend.

Given the Dust Bowl's devastation on American farmers and the environment, one might be concerned about the possibility of something like this happening again, primarily due to climate change, weather extremities, and increasing drought conditions.

Our soils today cannot store water or absorb heavy precipitation and thus are more susceptible to periods of drought or even flooding. The soil has also grown increasingly dependent on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to sustain its productivity. These chemicals are washed away into nearby rivers, lakes, and oceans during heavy rainfall, destroying marine wildlife and vegetation.

Since our soil's health has been declining, current agricultural practices have changed to improve the conditions, such as 'no-till planting, a way of planting new crops by slicing through plant residues from previous harvests, thus minimizing soil disturbance. Cover crops are also beneficial for soil health. A crop is grown to keep land covered when a profitable crop is harvested. The next one is produced, preventing soil erosion. Finally, the practice of crop rotations is beneficial to soil health, which is the use of diverse crops for grazing animals over multiple years to build healthier soils.

Agricultural workers are hopeful in preventing another Dust Bowl by recognizing the regenerative potential to heal the land, increase farming profits, improve food nutrition, and improve the climate conditions of these areas.

Despite the multi-billion dollar industry in the agricultural sector of the United States economy, three-quarters of U.S. farms only profit about $50,000 a year. Agricultural economic analysts will say that these farms have a significant source of income that is not on the farm. Large corporations do not explicitly own most farms in the U.S. Still, they are family-run farms with partnerships with large corporations.

Public Domain from
https://www.pxfuel.com/en/free-photo-jnyps

Financially, many corporations and family-owned farms purchase future contracts that promise to agree to sell at an agreed-upon price on a specific date. Farmers then take their chances on what the price will be at the time of harvest. Large corporations then have an advantage over small farmers.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Agriculture assists farmers more so than historically before. They provide emergency assistance, technical assistance, and even assistance to combat bee colony collapse disorder, as well as the 74% of farmers affected by the opioid crisis.

#6 Migrant Farm Workers: America's Backbone

By definition, a migrant worker is a person who leaves their permanent home to find work that is often seasonal and therefore temporary.

In the 19th century, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican workers did most of the underpaid, physically demanding agricultural work in the Western parts of the United States. By the 20th century, most of the work was done by Latinx workers, primarily because of the misleading "Bracero program." This program brought thousands of Latinx migrant workers to the U.S. in the 1940s to replace those who disputed domestic wages, went on strike, organized unions, and filled the overall labor shortage during World War II.

Migrant agricultural worker's family. Public Domain from https://picryl.com/media/migrant-agricultural-workers-family-seven-hungry-children-mother-aged-thirty-4

The blaming of undocumented immigrants for the nation's problems has been an American pastime, especially in difficult economic times. Unfortunately, given the previous presidential term under President Donald Trump, this abuse and horrendous allegations towards immigrants have risen astronomically. One of the most common stereotypes pointed towards undocumented Americans is that they steal jobs from American workers. The impact of immigrant labor points to the fact that this population often works the unpleasant, physically demanding jobs that native-born workers are unwilling to do. Contrary to this belief, undocumented Americans do not take away jobs from American workers because there is not a fixed number of jobs in the economy. Instead, new jobs are created by forming new businesses, spending their incomes on American goods and services, paying taxes, and overall benefiting the economy. Undocumented immigrants pay more than $90 billion in taxes every year and receive only $5 billion in welfare. They represent about 15% of the general U.S. workforce. They account for a quarter of entrepreneurs and a quarter of investors in the U.S. economy. Undocumented Americans have

Migrant workers picking cabbage in Ohio. Public Domain from https://www.flickr.com/photos/bobjagendorf/5123728839

not created the challenges we face as a nation, nor would they disappear if we closed off our borders, preventing immigration. If we did not have the support from those who immigrated to America, our problems, such as the decline in our economic competitiveness, would be increasingly worse and impossible to solve.

In reaction to the debilitating working conditions migrant farmworkers were victims of, activists such as Cesar Chavez led the Farmworkers movement, a series of activism and protests to fight for better wages, improved working conditions, unemployment insurance, paid vacation days, and a worker's right to protest.

Today, most migrant workers are employed in agriculture, planting, harvesting, and packing products such as fruits, vegetables, and nuts for the country's food economy. According to the Department of Labor, over 2.4 million migrant farmworkers make up this demographic, half of whom have no legal status in the U.S.

On average, the typical migrant farm worker comes from Central and South American countries such as Mexico, Jamaica, Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic and is usually around 30 years old. In this field, both men and women leave their homes each year to make enough money to support their families, feed themselves, or purchase land or home upon returning to their home countries. Some migrant farmworkers seek to save money for other aspirations, such as a college education. Historically, migrant workers lacked educational opportunities, have lived in poverty, and have faced discrimination and violence when seeking fair treatment and union organizations. Still today, migrant farmworkers often lack unions to protect them because of the nature of the work. Constantly moving from place to place makes accessing social services, healthcare, and mental health support extremely difficult. While some migrant farmworkers are legal U.S. citizens, those who are not are vulnerable to exploitation by those in power. Those working in agriculture are often exposed to deadly pesticides and fertilizers that cause short-term and long-term health issues like asthma or cancer. Migrant farmworkers are 35 times more likely to die from heat-related illnesses than any other profession because there are no federal heat regulations to protect them in the workplace.

The U.S. food economy would not survive without migrant farmworkers, no matter where they came from or how they got here. The nonprofit organization, Farmworker Justice, seeks to empower migrant and seasonal farmworkers by improving their living and working conditions, immigration status, health, occupational safety, and access to justice. Learn more about how you can help at their website, www.farmworkerjustice.org.

United Farmworkers protest. Public domain. (Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University).

#7 Modern Migration: From the Great Migration to Covid-19

In the classic American novel, The Grapes of Wrath, the Joad family packs their few possessions in a rickety truck and leaves their farm in Oklahoma, hoping to find a better life in California. They are part of a migration of nearly half a million people who fled the devastation of the Dust Bowl in the 1930s.

Migration has always been a part of American history, closely paralleled to its counterpart, immigration. The difference between migration and immigration is that migration occurs within the interior of international borders. In contrast, immigration occurs from one country to another.

The United States has seen, thus far, three significant migrations in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the Great Migration of Black southerners, the Midwestern migration during the Dust Bowl, and the present-day Covid-19 remote worker migration.

The "Great Migration" refers to the mass movement of 5 million Black people from the South to Northern and Western parts of America between 1915 and 1960. Many moved to Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and New York City. Part of the motivation for this migration combined the desire to escape poor economic conditions and the promise of more significant opportunities in the North. Since the emancipation, rural southern Black people had suffered in a plantation economy that offered little chance of financial advancement. Most were sharecroppers, tenant farmers, barely scraping by annually. World War I created many jobs in Northern factories.

African American family moving from the south to Chicago. Public Domain from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African-American-family-South-Chicago-1922.jpg.

The railroad industry in Pennsylvania and Illinois paid for Black people to migrate North. In addition to new job opportunities, Black people also migrated North due to racial oppression in the South, such as lynching, inequality in education, and the denial of suffrage. People were moving to Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle by World War II. Between 1940 and 1960, over 3.3 million Black migrants left the South. To this day, this remains one of the largest internal migrations in the history of the United States.

In the five years before 1940, more than 70,000 Midwestern Americans migrated westward to California and Arizona, hoping for a small plot of land to call their own, after escaping the clutches of the ecological disaster of the Dust Bowl. Because of the scarcity of land due to

the migration, these migrants began to harvest cotton and fruit, pushing out Hispanic and Filipino laborers who already worked in the state. These migrants depressed wages which satisfied farm owners but ultimately took away jobs from the resident farmworkers. Families packed their belongings and set out on a journey down Route 66, with a peak in migration in 1937 and 1938.

When the migrants got to the town of Barstow, CA, they encountered a fork in the road, where continuing on Route 66 would take them to the Los Angeles area, or, if they were to go north, they would find California's central agricultural valleys. About 38% chose to continue to Los Angeles, where they did not find a warm welcome.

Many chose to leave in the migration of Midwesterners because of the Dust Bowl, a long-standing economic decline for farmers in Oklahoma, and the stress on tenant farming. We see this parallel narrative of 'othering' migrant farmworkers in the past and present cases with Mexican migrant farmworkers and Midwestern migrant farmworkers in Mother Road.

It is an understatement to say that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way our world operates today. Many countries have closed their borders to international travelers, migrant flows, whether temporarily or permanently, are not as steady as before the pandemic.

As the Covid-19 pandemic shut down the U.S. economy, many companies scrambled to adapt to the change of operations to keep their companies afloat. Many workers had to change into working from home overnight, quickly setting up remote workplaces, many of whom had never done so before. Only 20% of employees in the U.S. were working remotely before the pandemic.

Public Domain from https://www.flickr.com/photos/officenow/2631536228

Both companies and workers had to quickly figure out what they needed and how to use it. At the same time, simultaneously, the boundary between personal life and work was blurred together. People made workspaces out of their bedrooms, closets, or even bathrooms. Parents also assisted children in virtual learning, a frontier to which they had never encountered before. Recently, since vaccination rates are up and lockdown restrictions are being loosened, companies are evaluating whether or not it is essential to return to an in-person working environment. For those employees who choose to work remotely, the opportunity to travel while working virtually is desirable.

While some companies are urging employees to come back to in-person offices, only 61% of workers anticipate spending half of their work time in person if they can. When you can work remotely from anywhere, many workers asked themselves where they indeed wanted to work, whether closer to family, in a cheaper state, or even on the open road.

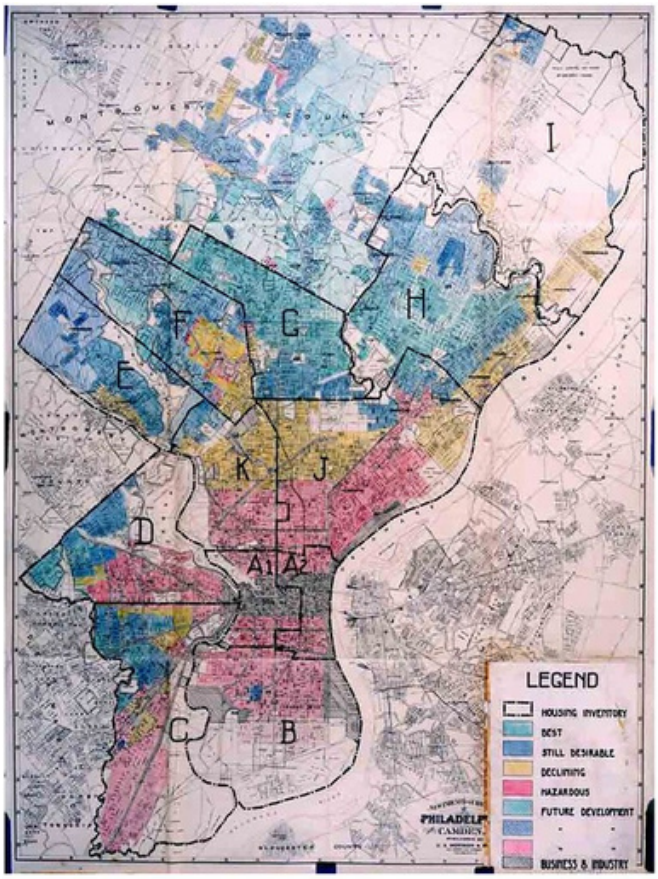
#8 Property Rights: Women's Struggle for Land Ownership

It is not common knowledge that the rights for women to own property in the United States have not been around as long as men's rights. Until women were legally granted the right to own their property, a husband or another male relative had control over any property allotted to them, which meant women did not gain legal protections for their financial rights. Redlining, which is the changes in values given to property based on the population residing in the property, also discriminated against minorities, women, and the poor.

The passage of the Married Women's Property Act in 1848 allowed married women to independently conduct business, hold sole ownership of any inherited or given property, and alone file lawsuits. By 1900, every state gave married women control over their own inherited or given property. However, to purchase the land outright, until the mid-1970s, women could not access a line of credit without a man to cosign her application. It was not for another decade later that women could purchase land without a male cosigner.

Over the past two centuries, the US government has passed numerous laws targeting minorities from owning property, including undocumented individuals. Not only were laws passed to make it more difficult for undocumented individuals to own property, but racism was prevalent in banking practices for those applying for loans or credit.

In the 1920s, more than a dozen states had passed their laws that limited or prohibited undocumented individuals from owning, leasing, or inheriting land.



Redlining in Philadelphia courtesy of the federal government. Public Domain.

Some undocumented immigrants placed tracts of land in their children's names as a way of getting around the law. In California, this type of law was repealed in 1952. It is important to note that Florida was the last state to eradicate the law that made it difficult for undocumented people to own land in 2018.

Like countless women across American history, Martín's mother could never achieve her dream of owning her land due to the country's laws preventing women and the undocumented from owning land.

#9 An Interview with Octavio Solis and Brian Herrera

The following essay was written by Brian Herrera in the fall of 2015, as a part of an interview series called Cafecito (Coffee and chat). This series focuses on the playwrights from the Latinx Theatre Commons Carnaval of New Latina/o Work.

Brian Herrera: Tell me about the origin of Mother Road.

Octavio Solis: A few years ago, I did an adaptation of an early Steinbeck novel, The Pastures of Heaven, for the California Shakespeare Theatre with the Word for Word Performing Arts Company. We took some research trips down to Salinas, California, and we stopped at The National Steinbeck Center. When The National Steinbeck Center decided to focus on The Pastures of Heaven as the featured book for their next Steinbeck Festival, they invited me down to be a guest speaker and to do an excerpt from my play. While I was there, I overheard the executive director, Colleen Bailey, telling someone that The Grapes of Wrath would be featured for the next festival and that the Steinbeck Center planned to invite artists to take a road trip along the route taken in the novel. I got very excited. I said, "You need a writer?" It was sort of brassy of me, but the opportunity was just calling to me. I told her, "You're not taking this trip without me." So, she made it happen. That was about two, maybe three years ago.

Brian: What was that road trip like?

Octavio: It was me, the executive staff of the Steinbeck Center, and two other artists—a visual artist and a filmmaker—as well as the filmmaker's four-member crew. Eleven people were just doing the journey of the Joad family all the way on Route 66 from Sallisaw, Oklahoma, to Bakersfield, California. We were also joined by two reps from Penguin Books, who brought a bookmobile. We headed westward over thirteen days, living together and cooking for each other. Journey partners in cities along the way set up interviews with community members, and we took their oral histories. Along the way, I reread the novel—which I hadn't read since high school—making comparisons between things then and things today.

It was really an interesting trip, but I didn't know whether I was writing a series of poems or a one-off reader's theatre piece for the Steinbeck Center until I got to the final stop at the Arvin Migrant camp in California, just outside of Bakersfield. There we interviewed this young person who had worked in those fields as a kid. Of all the people we interviewed, about seventy-five total, this young man was maybe the only one who, when we asked, "Have you read The Grapes of Wrath?" said yes. And he knew it very well. He was quoting passages back to us by heart. It was intense. For him, reading the novel was a very personal experience. He understood that Steinbeck was speaking to us today and, so for him, the book was very prophetic. He said that he was the new Tom Joad and that the migrant workers of today are the Okies of the '30s. He was my way into writing Mother Road.

Over the next couple of months, I wrote the play and, with the help of El Teatro Campesino, got it ready for a reading at the Steinbeck Center's annual festival. It went really, really well, but my obligation to the Steinbeck Center ended there. I think the play then sat around for almost a year until I submitted it to the [Latinx Theater Commons'] Carnaval. I'm not a

very polemical writer. I don't like to flash my opinion. Because if I want to do that, I can just write a tract or an essay and pass that out. I just present a story and let the audience draw its own conclusion.

Brian: One of the things about the play that really struck me, hearing it at Carnaval, is how your updating of the Joad family story forces the audience to confront some very contemporary questions of identity and heritage, as well as the ominous threat of ecological and economic emergency.

Octavio: I'm not a very polemical writer. I don't like to flash my opinion. Because if I want to do that, I can just write a tract or an essay and pass that out. I just present a story and let the audience draw its own conclusion. Of course, some of what I think is in there, but it's balanced by the voices of my characters. Not only that, but I was stepping into some big shoes with Steinbeck, some major shoes. The novel has a very specific point of view, but Steinbeck always stays just this side of stepping over the line into polemic. I felt I had to take my cues from him. He was very much a part of what I was doing. It was as if I was collaborating with him on this play.

Brian: How did taking *Mother Road* to Carnaval reactivate the journey of this play?

Octavio: Doing it there helped me identify director Juliette Carrillo as a good partner for this play. We only had twelve hours, which is very little time to rehearse. But I used the time. I did a lot of revisions based on each rehearsal, and every day I brought in new pages, made cuts, and made additional changes every step of the way. Even at our final tech "run through" on the day of the reading, I still introduced some cuts. And the cast rolled with it. I was really delighted that I was able to further hone the piece. But now comes the real work. Juliette and I really feel like the play's not production-ready yet. We feel that we need another workshop, and that's where the Goodman Theatre has come in. They've put Mother Road in their New Stages workshop series for this fall. So, it'll be up in Chicago this October. We'll have designers. We'll have a cast. Hopefully we'll have a composer. I hear music throughout. There are songs that are sung, and I'm starting to hear the texture of what that sound is like. It has to kind of evoke Woody Guthrie and Bruce Springsteen, but Latino music as well—a Los Lobos component or a ranchera component. And possibly a little bit of hip-hop, a Black spiritual…I hear it all building, live music—a guitar, banjo, possibly an accordion. I hear a fiddle. I hear percussion, like people drumming on a fruit crate.

And those sounds are created live by the chorus. Along with certain elements that are spoken. But I also see the chorus as extraordinarily physical. I think they make the set. I think they dress the characters. I think they are present all the time. They're moving all the time. They're always setting up the next scene, creating the environment. They create the road, they create the hotel room, they create the jail, they create all those things—in a real, physical way, so that they are the theatrical landscape. All that still needs to be explored.

Brian: Yes, even though Mother Road tells the specific story of very particular characters, it seems imperative that the script be approached as an ensemble piece.

Octavio: This is the kind of epic theatre that you can do on no budget at all, or you can do a big, massive budget. It would work either way. The best thing would be, if you have a big budget, you

create something that looks like it had no budget at all.

Brian: Anything else you'd like to add before we close this out?

Octavio: Yes. I know that there is another play here. One I still need to write. But I feel like I need to go back to Sallisaw to find out more about the agricultural community there, because the second play takes place entirely on that farm. Hopefully, the first play will be about Martín arriving there and the second play will be about the farm itself, about running the farm. How does Martín fare as a patrón? How does someone who was at the bottom of the ladder—what's it like for him to run that farm? A farm of that size and employees and budgets and agricultural concerns? What mistakes does he make? What are his challenges? How does he fare? How does he do?

Brian: Wow. So, I guess you joining that road trip really was destiny.

Octavio: It was, completely. It was one of the best things I've ever done in my life. It was life-changing.

#10 The American Dream: An Ever Changing Definition

Like Okies moving to California for a better life, immigrants and migrant farmworkers from around the globe face daily struggles and rejection from countries with grueling borders and tedious, impossible immigration laws such as the United States. Often, immigrants flee violence, political instability, and economic uncertainty. When they finally arrive, against all odds, they face exploitation, discrimination, and xenophobia in a country that once upheld the slogan, "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free…". These trials and tribulations are dealt with for the age-old notion of the "American Dream."

The American dream has been defined historically as the belief that anyone, regardless of where they came from, can obtain success in a society where upward-class mobility is accessible for everyone.

The term was first coined in 1931 by James Truslow Adams in his book titled Epic of America. He initially described it as "the dream that life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with the opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."
It is widely debated if the American dream is still achievable and what precisely the achievement entails.

Historically, homeownership and education were seen as a direct path to achieving the American dream. Homeownership and business ownership have also been seen as a symbol of financial success and independence. Homeownership in the U.S. varies significantly by race and ethnicity. In 2019, homeownership amongst white Americans was 73.3%, 57.7% amongst Asian or Pacific Islander Americans, 50.8% amongst Latinx Americans, and 42.1% amongst Black Americans.

The phrase "The American Dream" has

been accepted in society as being about the prospect of success. However, the original meaning of the phrase was not a dream of individual wealth. Instead, it was a dream of democracy for the nation. The phrase has evolved and been subjective based on the perspective of each generation. Perceptions of the American dream today are more positive amongst immigrants who are new to America, where 42% of them stated that the condition of the American Dream is in its best possible condition.

However, given undocumented individuals' struggles and minorities and the indigenous populations in America, the American Dream has roots in a patriotic ego and can be nearly impossible to obtain. To others, the definition of the American dream is subjective. It changes depending on who is the one doing the dreaming. To this point, an individual can live their own life to the fullest, as they define it for themselves.

The American Dream is not without its faults, often falling short of itself. As income inequality has increased throughout history, the American dream has been deemed less attainable. The fact that some see it as unattainable for some communities, and that it historically fails to acknowledge the mistreatment and abuse of indigenous peoples, enslaved peoples, victims of racism, and those who are the victims of law enforcement brutality, the long list of injustices and challenges have undermined the realization of the dream for many of whom live in the United States. Nevertheless, the realities do not diminish the American dream as a light of hope to nations worldwide.

The American Dream is still ideal to aim towards, but not relying on the U.S. government, because of the lack of confidence in U.S. institutions such as politics, major corporations, and the media, with 78% of individuals expressing distrust. Even with this, 63% of Americans are confident that they will attain their own American Dream, regardless of what these institutions do or don't do.

Some say that the American Dream is indeed dead because of the barriers one faces because of systematic inequalities that have to do with class, race, poverty, and gender. Whether they live in cities, rural communities, or small towns, many Americans share a pessimism about upward mobility, fearing that the American Dream is unattainable in their own lives.

According to a series of interviews of High School students in various states, the following statements were discovered regarding the American Dream.

"The term 'the American Dream to me means me being able to feel safe on every corner of America. It means I am offered the same opportunities as anybody else —male, female, black, white, whatever. If you have dreams beyond what other people feel like you should, you can't live the American Dream in a place like this."
-Jada H. 12th Grade; Arkansas

I don't know that the standard definition of the American Dream—of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and making something of yourself—[has] ever been entirely accurate, and I don't think it is now. Opportunities don't pop up for everyone. There are not enough opportunities to elevate everyone from the lower to the middle class. It's never going to be possible for everyone, and some serendipity is necessary.
-Perry A. 11th Grade, Kentucky

Though many will say that through willpower, drive, hard work, and

Free for commercial use, DMCA. Public Domain from https://www.pxfuel.com/en/free-photo-jrqfd

perseverance, one can achieve their own American Dream, it is apparent that not everyone starts with the advantages and equity that make an even playing field for everyone wanting their own American Dream. What was once claimed as the notion in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," now is not as accurate nor attainable for everyone today. This does not mean that the American Dream is unattainable nor impossible to achieve; people start at different places to pursue the American dream, making it more challenging to achieve this dream, given the obstacles and circumstances they may encounter.

The American Dream has been forced to be reconceptualized for the undocumented immigrants' narrative. A sense of identity and belonging have become lost amongst the struggle to assimilate, clutch onto a generational culture, and discover oneself.

Timeline of Mother Road's Development

1902 – John Steinbeck is born.

1909 – The Ford Model T is invented, the first vehicle sold to the American public.

1916 – The Great Migration begins, relocating more than 6 million African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North, Midwest, and West.

1926 – Route 66, also known as the 'Mother Road' is built, stretching from Chicago, Illinois to Santa Monica, California.

1930 - The Dust Bowl Migration begins, where thousands of Dust Bowl refugees, from states like Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, Kansas, and New Mexico, migrated west, hoping to find work.

1931 - A severe drought hits the Midwest and Southern plains, while dust storms begin, signifying the start of the 'Dust Bowl.'

1935 - The worst dust storm, called the 'black blizzard' causes extensive damage.

1938 - Route 66 is fully paved.

1939 - Rainstorms hit the Midwest, bringing an end to the drought and the Dust Bowl.

1939 -The Grapes of Wrath is written by John Steinbeck.

1940 - A Film adaptation for The Grapes of Wrath is released, directed by John Ford.

1940 - John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath wins the Pulitzer Prize.

1958 - Octavio Solis is born.

1962 - Political activist Cesar Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association and the United Farm Workers union with Dolores Huerta, establishing migrant worker's right to organize and secured better pay and working conditions for thousands of workers.

1962 - John Steinbeck wins the Nobel Peace Prize.

2014 - Mother Road is written by Octavio Solis, and has its first reading at the National Steinbeck Center with El Teatro Campesino.

2015 - Mother Road has its first workshopped production at the Goodman Theatre by the New Stages Festival in 2015.

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection

Food for Thought Questions

1. How do think our families shape who we are? Have you added anyone into your family who was not a blood relative?

2. Given our current climate crisis, how do you think the relationship between people and land needs to shift?

3. Have you ever been on a road trip? What do you remember most from the experience?

4. What issues do you stand up and fight for (or against)? What actions have you taken in this pursuit?

5. How would you like to be remembered? What would you like to pass on to a younger generation?

PARTNERS

DIAMOND ($100,000+)

Commission for Arts and Culture

THE ANDREW W. MELLON FOUNDATION

THE CONRAD PREBYS FOUNDATION

PLATINUM ($50,000 — $99,999)

Bernard & Dorris Lipinsky Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation

THE SHUBERT FOUNDATION INC.

GOLD ($25,000 — $49,999)

Peggy & Robert Matthews Foundation

SILVER ($10,000 — $24,999)

LEICHTAG FOUNDATION

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

NNPN National New Play Network

PRICE PHILANTHROPIES

usbank

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ($5,000 — $9,999)

STUDIO CONOVER

PRODUCER ($2,500 — $4,999)

Aztec Flower Market

DIRECTOR ($1,000 — $2,499)

Kerr Foundation Endowment Fund

Pratt Memorial Fund

LEADING ROLE ($500 — $999)

The Soledad Club

PRINCIPAL CHARACTER ($250 — $499)

Gaslamp Quarter Theatre Company Endowment

Sam Woodhouse, Artistic Director
Larry Alldredge, Managing Director

79 Horton Plaza,
San Diego, CA 92101-6144

Box Office
619.544.1000
boxoffice@sdrep.org