

*Group 1*

## PROPOSED PLAN OF WORK

## 1. BACKGROUND CONDITIONS

Ever since the independence of Texas was achieved in 1836, prejudices have existed between "gringos" and "greasers" along the Rio Grande border. Until about twenty years ago, however, much of the misunderstanding was rendered less harmful by plenty of space and simple living conditions. The recent rapid development of the citrus industry in the lower valley has attracted numerous individuals out of the north and peons out of the interior of Mexico, thus bringing two vastly different groups into closer contact and sharpening the friction among all classes.

This condition, which has long needed remedying, has more recently been brought to the forefront by the war situation and the resulting necessity for hemispherical solidarity.

The exchange of college students with Latin American nations, week-end trips by journalists into the south to write hurried articles, and the efforts of economists and politicians are unquestionably of value, but these are only a beginning. They result merely in informing the upper classes of one race about the upper classes of the other, whereas a real solution to the racial problem can come only after a study of the masses who live near the soil.

I propose to make such a study.

## II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT.

### 1. Purpose.

My project will be aimed at interpreting the peoples of the lower Rio Grande valley in such a way as to clarify the existing relationships between Anglo- and Latin-American groups, and to bring out particularly those relationships which impede a better understanding among them.

Since the emigrant Mexican valley worker represents a segment of the lowest class in the Latin American community, a study of his attitudes and reactions should make for a deeper insight into the mass psychology of our neighboring nations. Special care will be taken to maintain an impartial attitude and to picture both races as they actually are.

### 2. General nature:

The study will present in narrative form a cross-section of life in the valley during its rapid transformation from a wilderness into an Eden of citrus, with emphasis on the resulting social and spiritual conflicts between the racial groups.

### 3. Setting:

I shall choose a village like San Perlita, Texas, which in 1925 consisted of one or two mud shacks, a windmill and a water trough, and which is now a thriving Valley town.

4. Characters:

A. Natives:

- a. The vaqueros. This class was a part of the land before the first grapefruit and orange trees were planted in the valley. In the thousands of square miles along the border that have not been developed, they still ride among the thickets, expressing themselves through songs and tales about local events.
- b. The Anglo-American land owners and farmers, ranchers and speculators.

B. "Foreigners":

- a. The northerners, or "gringos", who came from among the fairly well-to-do classes of the central and eastern part of the United States.
- b. The peons from the interior of Mexico.

II. PAST EXPERIENCE WHICH HAS PREPARED ME FOR AN UNDERTAKING OF THIS KIND:

1. Early life on the border:

I grew up at Norias, headquarters of the lower part of the King Ranch, where my father was ranch foreman for twenty-five years. All my childhood companions were Mexican ranch hands.

back big envelopes, heavy with family secrets which my strange eye had no right to see, I read them back the answers. Again and again they dictated, and again I wrote. I tried not to notice when their voices labored under the embarrassment of some delicate message. I tried to keep my own voice level when I read them the words of anxious mothers and adoring sweet-hearts. This task taught me their lives, desires, attitudes and customs, and literally made me one of them.

At the age of twenty, I was elected Justice of the Peace by a majority of fifteen votes--there were fifteen eligible voters in the precinct. I registered the Mexican babies, held inquests for the dead, and conducted their weddings at five dollars per couple. Sometimes I would ride ten or fifteen miles on horseback to a wedding, carrying a Bible in a flour sack tied to the horn of the saddle. The priest from town charged ten dollars, so the groom, who always paid the bill, naturally preferred me. Usually, however, I came out as well off as the priest, because I could earn another five dollars by playing the accordian at the wedding dance. I served as Justice of the Peace for six years, thus further increasing my intimate knowledge of their ways and feelings. Much of the material in my book will be based on these experiences.

Some time afterwards they needed a teacher at Norias, so I went to Kingsville and obtained a teacher's certificate.

I was the only white child in the little one-room ranch school-- the same school which I afterwards taught. There was no other Anglo-American family living on the lower part of the King estate at that time. I speak Spanish and English with equal fluency.

When I was old enough to ride a horse, my father sent me to the corrida, or cow camp, because he wanted me to become a vaquero and, if I was ambitious, perhaps even a caporal, or foreman. It was in this camp that I spent much of my boyhood and young manhood, going for months without speaking an English word or seeing the inside of a house or even a tent, sleeping on the ground, living and working with the Mexican cow hands.

The school terms were brief and not very effective, but I learned some things about books. When I was about eighteen years old, Mexican emigrants began to swim the Rio Grande and find refuge from emigration officers in the brush country around Borias, which was twenty miles from the nearest town. Many of them got jobs in the camps and because I was the only one among them who could read or write, they made me their scribe. Into my ears they poured long letters to their mothers and wives back home, telling about this new country, with its mingled mesquite thickets and citrus orchards--about the yelping of coyotes and the clinking of Yankee gold. Faithfully but laborously--for their dialect was different from that of the vaqueros-- I wrote down their chopped-up Spanish, and when the mail brought

For four years I taught the sons and daughters of my former schoolmates. This again was a valuable experience. The country school, with its Anglo-American teacher and its Latin-American students, is an important chapter in the drama of the Rio Grande race conflict. After I left Morias I taught a year at Sarita and a year at La Gloria, two other small schools in which Anglo- and Latin-American children--of yankees and peons--were mixed. It is evident that my proposed study will be largely autobiographical.

## 2. Education.

I have a Master of Arts degree from the Texas College of Arts and Industries, at Kingsville. In addition, I taught in the English department of that college for one year. I am now working for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the University of Texas. My major interest is English and my field is southwestern literature.

## 3. Experience in creative writing:

I have written and published the following books:

The Voice of the Free Man, Kingsville Publishing Company, 1934.

Behind the Scenes, Christopher Publishing House, Boston, 1935.

The Devil in Texas, Regional Press, Dallas, Texas, 1936.

I am sending a copy of The Devil in Texas.

## IV. PRESENT STATE OF THE PROJECT:

I have a large quantity of unorganized data and am searching in the University newspaper collection for items which throw light on the development of the region where I plan to make my study. At present, of course, my progress is comparatively slow because I have neither the time nor the money to devote to the work. A Rosenwald Fellowship would make the completion possible.

## V. WHERE I INTEND TO WORK:

I shall do much of my work among the peoples of the Rio Grande border, but shall keep in touch with J. Frank Dobie and others who are interested in the project, for advice and criticism.

## VI. EXPECTATIONS FOR PUBLICATION:

I feel confident that in view of the fact that my subject is crucial at present, the resulting book should have a wide interest. In case national publishers should not feel inclined to accept it, it can be easily put out by a Texas firm.

## VII. FUTURE PLANS:

After the period of the fellowship, I shall continue to teach life and literature of the Southwest, either at the Texas College of Arts and Industries, where I have been promised a permanent position, or at Texas University. In either case, the knowledge I shall have gained through more intimate contact with valley people will make me unusually well fitted for the task of developing in my students a deeper understanding and appreciation of the traditions and culture of the land to which they belong.