

Module 7: America at the Turn of the Century – 1900 to the 1930s

Topic 4 Content: Impacts of the Great Depression

Introduction

Impacts of the Great Depression

Introduction

Click the tabs on the left to learn about the impacts the Great Depression had on the lives of Americans.

Picture: Unemployed men marching, around 1930



Click the images below to learn about the impacts the Great Depression had on the lives of Americans.

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Unemployment and Homelessness

Impacts of the Great Depression

Unemployment and Homelessness

- Record numbers unemployed
- Soup kitchens and charities helped middle class
- Odd jobs for money
- Homelessness escalated
- Shanty towns/Hoovervilles sprung up.

Picture: Dorothea Lange's photo of mother and children in Oklahoma, 1936



The Great Depression brought about record numbers of unemployed Americans. Specifically, almost twenty-five percent of people did not have a job, compared to three percent four years prior. About two million men became hobos, wandering around the countryside in search of work. People who kept their jobs experienced severe pay cuts, and constantly worried they would get fired. Middle class families found themselves in soup kitchens and charity lines that previously supported only the poorest Americans. Often, charities could not meet the high demands of community members. As a consequence, many Americans started to perform odd jobs, and those who previously held high-income careers began working in labor jobs that involved tasks like cleaning laundry or driving taxicabs. Others would grow vegetables in their backyards to sell in markets for spare change. Similarly, rates of homelessness escalated, and shanty towns arose where people lived in communities filled with shacks made of trash. Frustrated Americans called these shanty towns Hoovervilles, after President Hoover.

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Psychological Effects

Impacts of the Great Depression

Psychological Effects

- Psychological distress
- Suicides escalated
- Long term impacts

Picture: Photographer, Dorothea Lange's montage of a 32 year old migrant mother with her seven children, 1936



Times were so difficult for Americans during the Great Depression that many people experienced severe psychological distress. The suicide rate climbed to over thirty percent. The negative impacts continued into the future as well: some people never went back to their prominent careers, others veered from a college-bound path, and some decided not to have families or children. Dreams were often swept by the wayside.

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Topic 4 Content: Impacts of the Great Depression



Farmers

Impacts of the Great Depression

Farmers

- 400,000 foreclosed farms by 1932
- Could not pay mortgages
- Little demand for crops
- Migration to urban areas for work

Picture: Homeless family walking the interstate from Phoenix, AZ to San Diego, CA to enroll in welfare and find work, 1939



In addition, almost 400,000 farms foreclosed by 1932 because farmers could not pay their mortgages. There was also a lack of demand for crops. Therefore, many farmers and their families migrated to urban areas in search of alternative types of employment.

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Topic 4 Content: Impacts of the Great Depression

Hoover's Conservative Interventions

Impacts of the Great Depression

Hoover's Conservative Interventions

- Few government interventions
- Wanted community leaders to help
- Public work projects

Picture: Construction of the Hoover Dam above the Colorado River, 1932



President Hoover maintained that the economy would recover with little government intervention. Rather, he asked leaders of businesses and banks to take measures that would help Americans keep their jobs. He also created public work projects to provide jobs for thousands of workers. For example, he ordered the creation of the Boulder Dam, later named the Hoover Dam.

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Political Unrest

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Political Unrest

- Belief the government needed to help more
- Labor unions
- Election of Franklin Roosevelt

Picture: Franklin Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover traveling to the U.S. Capitol for Roosevelt's inauguration, 1933



As unemployment continued to increase, political unrest became evident. Many Americans believed the government needed to do much more to help those struggling to survive. Several labor unions started rallying to find solutions to problems of the depression era. For example, they insisted on better wages and the creation of more jobs. This political unrest ultimately would be answered through the election of a great leader, President Franklin Roosevelt.