



Prosperity and Decline

Student Volume

Huey Long



The Great Depression



The Roaring Twenties



Printed for Scripps-Howard Newspapers by William C. Hoople

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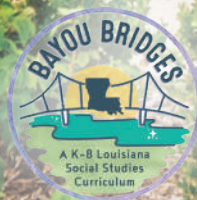
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Prosperity and Decline

Student Volume



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Table of Contents

01	Chapter 1: The Roaring Twenties	2
02	Chapter 2: Louisiana and the Huey Long Era.....	22
03	Chapter 3: The Great Depression	38
	Glossary	58

Chapter 1

The Roaring Twenties

The Framing Question

What were the main events that occurred in the United States during the 1920s?



Looking Ahead

With the catastrophic First World War at an end, Americans looked ahead to what they hoped would be better times.

The 1920s are often referred to as the Roaring Twenties, a time of expansive industrial growth and cultural change.

*For the first time, more Americans lived in towns and cities than lived in rural areas. And there arose, in cities especially, a vibrant, new, energetic culture of **modernity**: a culture of new ideas, new styles, and new ways of living.*

Vocabulary

modernity, n. the state of being modern or up-to-date



The spirit of the Roaring Twenties was expressed in the rising popularity of bands and singers.



Painted for Scripps-Howard Newspapers
by William C. Hoople

The period was marked by the emergence of consumer culture, in which many people were presented with greater opportunities to buy things and define themselves by the things they owned. Consumer culture flourished as the lives of millions of Americans were transformed by an increasing abundance of goods and technologies, including automobiles, telephones, radios, motion pictures, and electrical appliances. New urban fashions and lifestyles emerged, among them young women called flappers and a new, energetic dance called the Charleston. It was also known as the Jazz Age—a decade in which jazz music, a new genre inspired by blues and ragtime that originated in the African American communities of New Orleans, gained wide popularity.



Find Out the Facts

Research the growing popularity of jazz in the 1920s and its influence on modern music.

How did this all come about? During the First World War, the federal government had imposed wartime controls on the economy. But in 1920, Warren G. Harding was elected president of the United States, and Harding said it was time for the nation to return

to “normalcy.” By “normalcy,” the new president meant in part a return to a time of less government involvement in the economy. “We want,” he said, “less government in business.”

Left Out of Prosperity

Throughout much of the 1920s, the economy grew. Increasing numbers of Americans enjoyed lifestyles of plenty. But not everyone gained a higher standard of living during this time. Forty percent of the nation lived in poverty, and some areas of the economy—textiles and agriculture especially—stagnated or declined. Millions of Americans, in both rural and urban settings, remained poor and, having little money, were unable to participate in the expanding consumer culture. The swift economic decline of 1929 would bring an end to the era’s “roar.” The decade that followed, the 1930s, would bring years of hardship in an era that came to be known as the Great Depression.

Think Twice



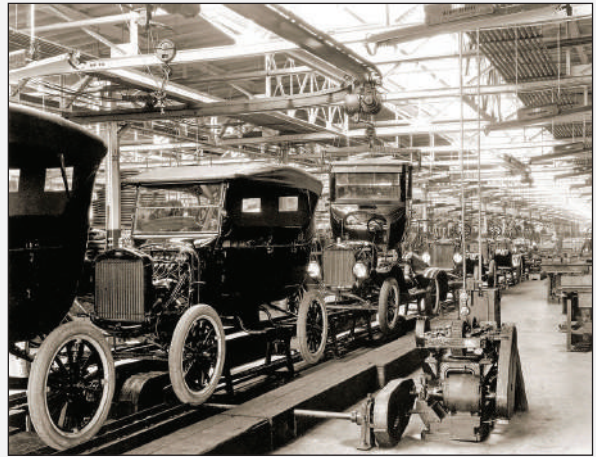
What does it mean that millions of Americans “were unable to participate in the expanding consumer culture”?



A Booming Economy

In 1922, the United States emerged from the economic downturn that had followed the end of the First World War. For the next seven years, the nation's economy boomed. By 1929, industrial workers' real wages (wages when adjusted for inflation) were up by a third, and the economy had grown overall by 40 percent.

The assembly line was one of the innovations incorporated into the manufacturing process. Assembly line production increased the speed with which products could be made, and it lowered the cost of those products. Assembly line production traces its roots back to 1913, the year in which Henry Ford introduced the **moving assembly line** in his Detroit, Michigan, automobile **assembly plant**. Ford's moving assembly



Ford Model T assembly line, Detroit, Michigan, 1924

Find Out the Facts



Research the range of hourly or daily wages people received in a number of jobs and professions in the early 1900s compared to today.

line brought the cars to workers as they stood at their stations. This reduced the time it took to build a car. Ford was able to raise his workers' wages from \$2.40 a day to five dollars a day. And in the 1920s, Ford's assembly line would be adopted in mass production facilities across the country.

At the same time, the United States was producing 40 percent of the world's manufactured goods. As productivity rose, wages rose. As wages rose, families had more money to buy more things—and in turn, the increased demand for goods and services put more people to work.

Vocabulary

“moving assembly line” (phrase) a mechanical system in which a product moves through stages and workers each add a different part to it

assembly plant, n. a factory in which cars, machines, or other products are put together

Find Out the Facts



Find out what percentage of the world's manufactured goods the United States produces today.

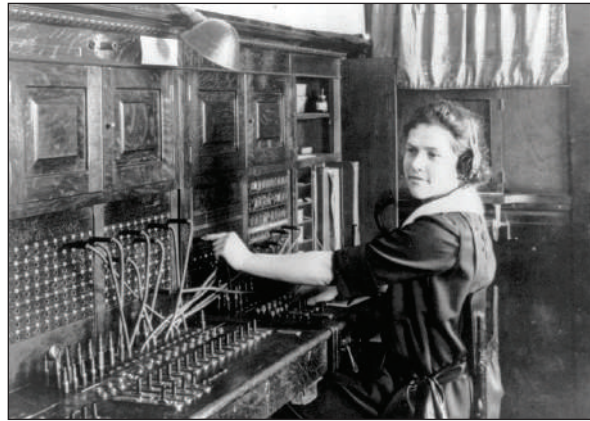
For much of the 1920s, the Ford Motor Company and General Motors led the automobile industry, which had become the nation's economic powerhouse. By 1929, half of all American families owned a car. The nation's growing car culture helped the economy grow. As more Americans drove cars, the need for new roads, bridges, and traffic lights increased, putting demand on governments to finance them. Employment in the private **sector** grew as more and more restaurants and gas and service stations opened. Bankers benefited by making car loans, and the automobile insurance industry grew. The hospitality industry also grew as more people traveled for business or vacation and stayed in motels and hotels. Able to commute to work in their cars, increasing numbers of Americans moved to the suburbs.



Think Twice

How did America's growing car culture transform the way people lived?

The 1920s were also a time when electric power reached many homes for the



A switchboard operator manually connecting a telephone call

first time. Wires strung on telephone poles ran along newly paved roads and into homes and businesses. New electrical appliances filled millions of homes: radios, record players, vacuum cleaners, electric lights, electric fans, electric irons, and refrigerators. Electricity brought new jobs. Industries arose to service and repair appliances. Before radios, there had been no radio announcers or radio station managers. But in the 1920s, scores of local radio stations sprang up across the country. The 1920s also saw the increasing installation of telephones in homes and businesses, and tens of thousands of telephone **switchboard**

Vocabulary

sector, n. a part or division

switchboard, n. a panel on which switches or other connectors are used to complete electrical circuits

operators—most of them women—were hired to connect people’s calls.

With the arrival of radio, along with the manufacture and availability of innumerable new products, came the rise of advertising. Radio stations, magazines, and newspapers all became vehicles for advertising products for the home.



Mass Entertainment Culture

The first radio station, KDKA, broadcasting out of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, went on the air in 1920. By the decade’s end, millions of radios were in use across the country. As broadcast networks grew, Americans in remote rural areas could listen to the same music and the same programs as those who lived in suburbs and cities. As radio became a more universal experience, it contributed to a growing common national popular culture.



Think Twice

How might the increasing number of broadcast networks have benefited people living in rural areas?

Motion pictures—the movies—were another important part of popular

culture in the decade. When movies were invented in the 1890s, they had been silent. In some theaters, a pianist would play music to accompany action on the screen, but movies themselves did not have sound. In 1927, however, with the addition of new technology, soundtracks were placed along the edge of **celluloid film**, and pictures and sounds were synced. The modern era of “talking pictures” had begun. People young and old loved the movies. By 1929, ninety million people went to the movies each week!

This was also the decade in which the most popular movie actors began to be called stars. Charlie Chaplin had risen to international fame in the era of silent films. He was most famous for his role as the Tramp—a bumbling, good-hearted fellow who wore a bowler hat and oversized shoes and twirled a cane. The Tramp confronted, most often with manners and dignity, various frustrating circumstances in modern industrializing urban society.

Vocabulary

celluloid film, n. flexible, transparent plastic film on which images are recorded



Charlie Chaplin is one of the most important figures in the history of film.



Popular Heroes

Professional sports, especially baseball and boxing, grew in popularity in the 1920s and 1930s. Fans grew to know the life stories and the career successes of sports icons such as Babe Ruth. “The Babe,” as Ruth was nicknamed, was a multitalented, home run–hitting baseball player who played for the New York Yankees.

Jesse Owens, an athlete born in Alabama, won four gold medals in the track-and-field events at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. This unprecedented number of Olympic wins for a single athlete was viewed as a blow to Adolf Hitler, the German dictator. Hitler had expected the games to showcase the superiority of “Aryan” Germans. Instead, they were upstaged by the triumph of a Black American.

As well as Jesse Owens’s obvious athletic talent, one other incident stood out. The talented German athlete Luz Long, who had been beaten by Jesse Owens in the long jump event, warmly congratulated Owens.



Jesse Owens competing at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany

In an act of defiance, Luz Long and Jessie Owens walked arm in arm through the Berlin stadium, greatly angering the Nazis in attendance. And so began a friendship that spanned many years.

Charles Lindbergh became an overnight international celebrity after he completed his solo nonstop flight from New York to Paris in 1927. Flying in his single-engine airplane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, for more than thirty hours across the Atlantic Ocean, Lindbergh landed outside the city of Paris to a cheering crowd. Weeks later, upon his return to New York, “Lucky Lindy” was celebrated with a grand **ticker-tape parade** on Broadway. Hundreds of thousands of people attended.

A few years after Lindbergh’s flight, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Earhart set many other flight records as well, including being the first woman to fly solo nonstop across the United States from the West Coast to the East Coast. Amelia Earhart was well known, too, as the author of best-selling books about her flying experiences. She died, along with her navigator, during their effort to circumnavigate the globe by air. Their plane went down over the Pacific Ocean.

Find Out the Facts

Find out more about Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart.



Vocabulary

ticker-tape parade, n. a parade held in a city in which decorative shredded paper is thrown onto the parade route



Aviator Charles Lindbergh in front of his plane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, 1927



Amelia Earhart in the cockpit of her Lockheed Electra airplane



Writers' Corner

Using your research on Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart, write a report about some of the striking events that occurred in their lives.

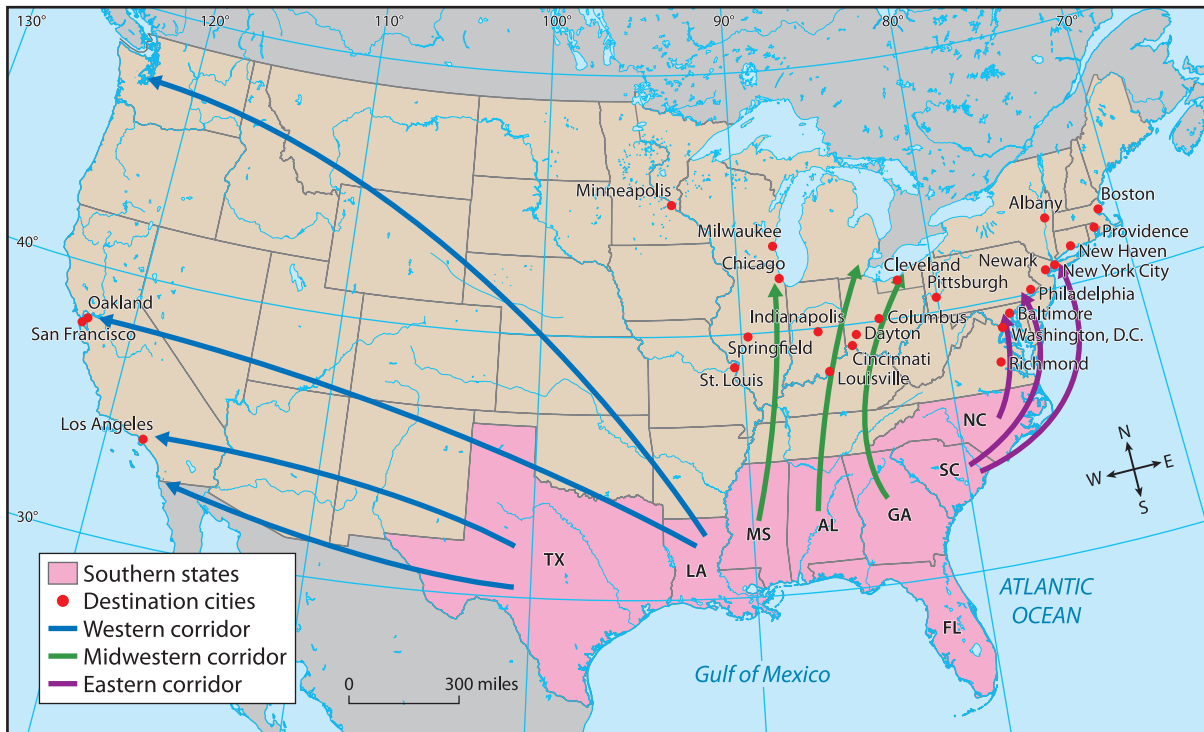


The Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance

The Great Migration refers to masses of African Americans from the rural South who streamed into the cities of the North, Midwest, and West during and after the

First World War. European immigration had all but stopped during the war. Many young American men had left their jobs to serve in the military. Hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved northward for economic opportunities. That northward migration continued in the 1920s. Almost a million African Americans migrated from the American South to New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and other cities. Often, African Americans left behind legal segregation and the dire poverty of sharecropping and other low-paying jobs in the South. They found improved opportunities

The Great Migration of African Americans from the Rural South to Cities of the North, Midwest, and West, 1916–30



in Northern cities. In the North, however, African Americans continued to experience racial prejudice and discrimination in terms of jobs, housing, and their daily lives.

Soon, a new urban Black culture emerged in northern cities. By the 1920s, Harlem, in New York City, functioned as something of a city within a city. Harlem was home to some two hundred thousand Black Americans, many from the South and others recent immigrants from the Caribbean. It was in 1920s Harlem that a literary and artistic movement called the Harlem **Renaissance** emerged. Writers, artists, and thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance celebrated Black lives and achievements even as they mourned the plight of and discussed the path forward for Black Americans.

Countee Cullen was a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Cullen grew up in New York City from the age of nine and won prizes in high school for his poetry and speeches. At New York University, and later at Harvard University,

Cullen honed his craft as a writer. In his poem “Heritage,” Cullen explores the complexity and meaning of African Americans’ origins. The first and last lines of the first stanza of the poem are “What is Africa to me?”

Find Out the Facts



Read the entire poem “Heritage,” by Countee Cullen.

Langston Hughes grew up in the Midwest. He made his way to New York City as a young man, studied for a time at Columbia University, and was a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance. His life’s calling, he said, was “to explain and illuminate the Negro condition in America.” In a poem he wrote later in his life, “Harlem,” Hughes movingly asked, “What happens to a dream deferred?”

Zora Neale Hurston’s writing drew on her anthropological interest in African American life and folklore—an interest she explored as an undergraduate at Barnard College in New York City. Her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is considered a classic of the Harlem Renaissance. In the novel, Hurston tells the heartrending story of Janie Crawford’s growth from adolescence into adulthood.

Vocabulary

renaissance, n. a time of intense cultural and artistic rebirth

The Harlem Renaissance brought exciting advances in the world of art, as painters, sculptors, and other creators expressed African American themes and experiences through visual mediums. Sculptor Augusta Savage's **Salon** of Contemporary Negro Art was the first art gallery opened in America that featured work by an African



Zora Neale Hurston was an author, anthropologist, and filmmaker who highlighted racial struggles in the American South.

Vocabulary

salon, n. a fashionable gathering of creative people held at the home of a prominent person

American woman. She later became the first director of the Harlem Community Art Center, where many young African American artists developed their talents. Among these was the painter Jacob Lawrence, who painted a series based on the Great Migration and another on life in Harlem. He was the first African American artist to have his work acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Another sculptor, Sargent Claude Johnson, lived in San Francisco but was considered a part of the Harlem Renaissance because he furthered its ideals and concentrated on African American subjects.

It was during these same years that legendary musical artists came to fame. Ella Fitzgerald was known as the "First Lady of Song." She experimented with styles from ballads to jazz and helped create the art of scat singing, a form of singing that features improvisation and nonsensical syllables. Pianist, composer, and bandleader Duke Ellington's contribution to American music was

the big band. Ellington blended new harmonies into a new sound. Trumpeter Louis Armstrong was a dominant influence in the era. Born in New Orleans, he led the development of jazz from a novelty into a fine art form. These and many other musicians played at the legendary

Find Out the Facts



Select one of the African American authors, artists, or musicians of the Harlem Renaissance, and find out more about that person's work and life. The person you select does not have to be one mentioned in this chapter.



Think Twice

Describe the relationship between the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance.

Cotton Club, a popular nightclub known for its floor shows. Weekly radio broadcasts from the club made its musicians famous nationally.



Trumpeter Louis Armstrong with King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band in Chicago, 1923



The Lost Generation

A group of young American artists and writers became disillusioned with life in the United States. They moved to Paris, France, in the 1920s and became known as the Lost Generation. The term refers to the discouragement felt by writers after World War I. These young people had “lost” their faith in the optimistic and traditional values of previous generations. They had seen those values lead the world into the First World War and the destruction it wrought. They were also skeptical about the changes that industrialization was bringing. They questioned the society they lived in and used their writing to think more deeply about life after the brutality of the First World War.

Two leading American authors in Paris were Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The styles of these writers could not have been more different. Hemingway’s style was concise and unemotional. Fitzgerald’s style was intensely poetic. Hemingway wrote of war as a symbol of the world. Fitzgerald’s themes were ambition, loss, love, money, and class. Yet both writers created disillusioned, alienated characters



Ernest Hemingway traveled the world and volunteered as an ambulance driver in Italy in World War I. Here he is shown in his passport photo.

inspired by their own experiences. Both writers embodied the Lost Generation.

The poet Ezra Pound, who helped and mentored many young writers, including Ernest Hemingway, also lived in Paris for a time. Lost Generation writers gravitated to the salon of Gertrude Stein, a daring, intellectual American poet, writer, and critic. At the salon, they mingled with famous European artists such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. Stein was herself a prolific writer and renowned for her wit, but her writing has been somewhat ignored in favor of her protégés’ work.

Think Twice

What motivated the work of the Lost Generation?

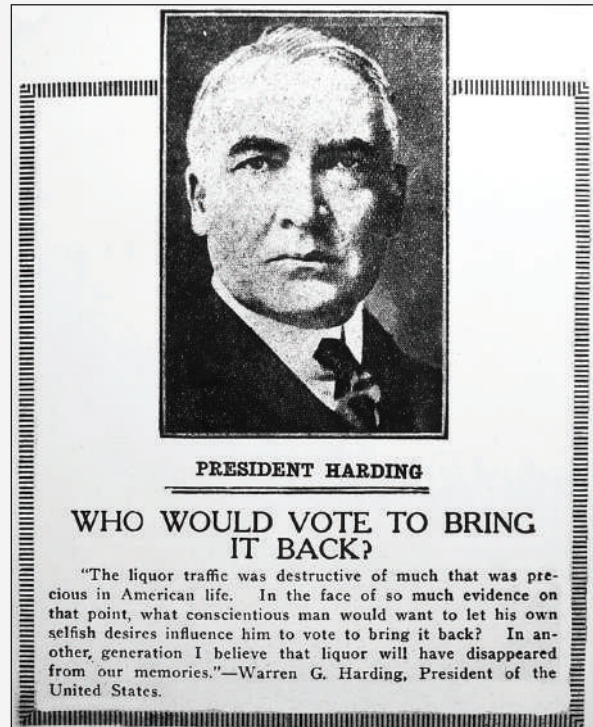




Prohibition

For many years, organizations, including a number of women's organizations, had worked to prohibit the sale of liquor. They claimed that society as well as individual people's lives would be improved if they did not drink. Indeed, alcohol consumption in the United States in the 1910s had reached more than two gallons each year for the average adult. Supporters of a federal ban on selling alcohol argued that doing so would reduce crime and corruption, improve the nation's health, and solve other social problems. Many were convinced by these arguments and the campaigns in favor of **prohibition**. In 1919, following the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, it became illegal to manufacture, sell, or transport intoxicating liquors.

But new laws can have unintended consequences, and that was the case with the Eighteenth Amendment. People who were unable to purchase alcohol legally turned to **bootleggers**. Bootleggers were so-called because of the trick of hiding a bottle or flask in a boot.



President Harding's Prohibition message, 1920s

Speakeasies and other outlets (including the Cotton Club) sold illegal alcohol from bootleggers and underground networks of **gangsters**.

Vocabulary

prohibition, n. the prevention of something, such as the sale of alcoholic beverages

bootlegger, n. someone who supplies illegal alcoholic beverages

speakeasy, n. a nightclub where illegal beverages are sold

gangster, n. a member of a criminal organization

Selling illegal alcohol made money, and rival gangs fought one another for control of the alcohol trade in cities. The most famous gangster of the 1920s was Al Capone. He was said to have hundreds of gunmen—and half of Chicago’s police force!—on his payroll. On February 14, 1929, Valentine’s Day, a group of men believed to be members of Al Capone’s gang gunned down members of George “Bugs” Moran’s rival gang in a Chicago warehouse. The murderous attack was dubbed the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.

By the 1930s, a lot of people no longer supported the ideas and restrictions associated with Prohibition. In 1933, the United States government repealed the Eighteenth Amendment by ratifying the Twenty-First Amendment, which ended Prohibition for good.



Think Twice

What most likely caused the gang rivalries in the 1920s?



Women’s Suffrage

During the Progressive Era, women engaged in political activism. Women

did not have the right to vote at that time, and over the course of the 1800s and early 1900s, various women worked for women’s **suffrage**.

Vocabulary

suffrage, n. the right to vote

One of the first women’s rights conventions was held in 1848 in the town of Seneca Falls, New York. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence had held “that all men are created equal,” but women were not explicitly included. The women and men assembled at the Seneca Falls Convention believed that all men and women are created equal. They issued their own declaration: “We insist that they [women] have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.” One of those rights and privileges was the right to vote.

Amelia Bloomer attended the Seneca Falls Convention. A year later, she became the first woman to own and edit a newspaper. Amelia Bloomer did something else that turned out to be important for women’s suffrage: she introduced Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to each other.

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton helped found the National Woman Suffrage Association. Later, they became leaders of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). They built a strong friendship and worked together for decades in the fight for a woman's right to vote. Stanton died in 1902, and Anthony died in 1906. Both were eighty-six years old when they died. They did not live to see the ratification of universal women's suffrage, but they had laid the foundation for its success.

A third leader who worked with Anthony and Stanton was Lucy Stone. She was the first woman in the United States to keep her own name after she married. This was a protest against the unequal marriage laws of the time. She wished to keep her own identity after marriage and campaigned for others to do so too.

Another suffragist leader was Ida B. Wells. She fought to support African American rights as well as those of women. Wells started the African American suffragist organization called the Alpha Suffrage Club in Chicago. At the time, white suffragists mostly supported the idea that the movement

should be racially segregated. While Wells had difficulty convincing white suffragists to include African American women in marches and other activities, her political efforts proved to be a foundation for future African American women in politics.

American suffragist Alice Paul initially became involved in the movement when she lived in England and joined the Women's Social and Political Union, the leading political organization for women's voting rights in Britain at the time. Returning to the United States, she became a tireless leader for the cause. She and her good friend Lucy Burns founded what became the National Women's Party. Lucy Burns and Alice Paul had met in a London police station when they were both arrested. Back in America, they continued their campaign for women's suffrage. Alice Paul had a talent for organizing large, attention-getting activities. Suffragists were arrested repeatedly, and in jail, they were beaten, chained, and abused. When they went on a hunger strike, they were violently force-fed. Nevertheless, they persisted in their fight. Alice Paul wrote the first Equal Rights Amendment (which failed to be ratified) in 1923,

and Lucy Burns became editor of the national publication *The Suffragist*.

Carrie Chapman Catt followed Anthony as president of NAWSA. She was an effective organizer at both state and federal levels. Her strategies converted President Woodrow Wilson into a supporter of women's suffrage, leading to the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.



An unidentified suffragist holds a silent vigil outside the White House.

Think Twice



What connections can be made between the fights for abolition and women's suffrage?

The Nineteenth Amendment

For decades, women across the United States had fought for the right to vote. Gradually these campaigns bore fruit, first on a state-by-state basis.

In the late 1800s, women in a few western territories and states—Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho—gained the right to vote. Before 1920, a small number of other states joined in granting women the vote. And finally, in 1920, with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, no woman could be denied the right to vote merely for being female! The Nineteenth Amendment reads: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” However, while it was true in law that all women now had the right to vote, it was not always true in practice. Many African American women, in particular, still faced severe voting restrictions on the basis of race and struggled to exercise their newly won right.

**PRIMARY SOURCE: "MOTHER TO SON"
BY LANGSTON HUGHES**

Well, son, I'll tell you:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

It's had tacks in it,

And splinters,

And boards torn up,

And places with no carpet on the floor—

Bare.

But all the time

I've been a-climbin' on,

And reachin' landin's,

And turnin' corners,

And sometimes goin' in the dark

Where there ain't been no light.

So boy, don't you turn back.

Don't you set down on the steps

'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.

Don't you fall now—

For I've still goin', honey,

I've still climbin',

And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Source: Hughes, Langston. "Mother to Son." *The Weary Blues*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1926, p. 107.

HEINZ Apple Butter.

An appetizing conserve of tart apples, sweet cider, granulated sugar and pure spices prepared in the Heinz Clean Kitchens.

Have your grocer send you a 3-lb crock today. If it does not please you, you may return it to him at full purchase price. If you find it as good as we think it is you will want a larger package next time. Nothing else can fill its place as

A Relish for Children's Luncheons.

A booklet about the 57 varieties and their making will interest careful housekeepers—yours for the asking.

H. J. Heinz Co.
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Anything That's

Is Safe To Buy.



ONE
OF THE
57

PRIMARY SOURCE: "A FLAPPER'S APPEAL TO PARENTS" (1922) BY ELLEN WELLES PAGE

I want to beg all you parents, and grandparents, and friends, and teachers, and preachers—you who constitute the "older generation"—to overlook our shortcomings, at least for the present, and to appreciate our virtues. I wonder if it ever occurred to any of you that it required brains to become and remain a successful flapper? Indeed it does! It requires an enormous amount of cleverness and energy to keep going at the proper pace. It requires self-knowledge and self-analysis. We must know our capabilities and limitations. We must be constantly on the alert. Attainment of flapperhood is a big and serious undertaking!

... We hold the infinite possibilities of the myriads of new inventions within our grasp. We have learned to take for granted conveniences, and many luxuries, which not so many years ago were as yet undreamed of. We are in touch with the whole universe. We have a tremendous problem on our hands. You must help us. Give us confidence—not distrust. Give us practical aid and advice—not criticism. Praise us when praise is merited. Be patient and understanding when we make mistakes.

We are the Younger Generation. The war tore away our spiritual foundations and challenged our faith. We are struggling to regain our equilibrium. The times have made us older and more experienced than you were at our age. It must be so with each succeeding generation if it is to keep pace with the rapidly advancing and mighty tide of civilization. Help us to put our knowledge to the best advantage. Work with us! That is the way! Outlets for this surplus knowledge and energy must be opened. Give us a helping hand.

Source: Page, Ellen Welles. "A Flapper's Appeal to Parents." *The Outlook*. December 6, 1922, p. 607.

Chapter 2

Louisiana and the Huey Long Era

The Framing Question

What was Huey Long's influence on the state of Louisiana?



Reactionary Politics

The Bourbon Democrats appeared in Louisiana after the Civil War. The name came from the Bourbon kings of France after the fall of Napoleon. The French Bourbon monarchs wanted to undo the changes that arrived with the French Revolution. Similarly, the Louisiana Bourbons believed they could reverse Reconstruction. They wanted to return society to how things were before Emancipation.



Huey Long was a flamboyant politician, governor of Louisiana (1928–31), and U.S. senator (1932–35).



For decades in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Bourbon Democrats dominated Louisiana politics. They maintained power by controlling voters through a combination of bribes and threats. They strongly opposed racial equality and supported Jim Crow laws. They reduced property taxes for wealthy landowners, businesses, and commercial activities. They offered **tax exemptions** and **subsidies** to businesses. At the same time, they cut spending on education, prisons, and asylums. They opposed minimum wage, workday hour limits, and social legislation. Social and racial tensions soared. It was in this atmosphere that a strong personality like that of Huey Long could rise to power.

Vocabulary

“tax exemption” (phrase) immunity from paying tax on certain income

subsidy, n. financial assistance given by a government to a person, group, or company

Think Twice



How might the Louisiana Bourbons have been similar to and different from the Bourbons in France?



Economic Boom in Timber, Oil, and Gas Industries

Louisiana is a land of abundant natural resources. By far the greatest of these at the time was timber. In 1880, it was estimated that 85 percent of Louisiana was covered by pine forests. Many of the huge trees were 150 to 200 years old. Oil and natural gas were discovered in the twentieth century. These resources proved to be among the richest in the country. The oil and gas industries brought political and economic benefits to the state, sometimes at great social and environmental costs.

In 1920, Louisiana ranked second in the nation in lumber production. The lumber boom was funded mainly by out-of-state lumber companies, whose policy was “cut out and get out.” Roughly 4.3 million acres (1.7 million hectares) of **virgin forests** were **clear-cut**. Only when the lumber mills ran out of timber in the mid-1920s did they close down.



Find Out the Facts

Research what natural changes occur in an area when all the trees are cut down.

During the lumber boom, huge industrial plants were built, with a central sawmill surrounded by **company towns**. These plants were abandoned when the lumber companies moved out, leaving the local workers jobless and without ownership of the homes in which they lived. The company towns became ghost towns.

In 1901, five brothers came to Louisiana from Texas to try their luck in finding oil. The Heywood brothers—W. Scott, Alba, O. W., Clint, and Dewey—struck it rich. Leasing land near Jennings, Louisiana, from a local farmer, they drilled two wells, the second beginning at the bottom of the first. The result was a well that initially produced seven thousand barrels per day. This was the birth of Louisiana’s oil industry. Within a few years, the oil field, also known as the Jennings Field, was producing one hundred thousand barrels per day.

Vocabulary

virgin forest, n. an old-growth forest in its natural state

clear-cut, v. to cut down all the trees in an area

company town, n. a town that is completely dependent on a single firm for employment, housing, stores, and other necessities

Additional oil fields along with gas fields discovered in the 1910s and 1920s propelled Louisiana to become one of the top oil and gas producers in the nation. Within three decades, oil and gas became the state's main industries. Oil and gas deposits were also discovered along the Gulf of Mexico. Marine drilling equipment was developed, and the oil industry

advanced along the coast rapidly in the late 1930s.

In many ways, the oil and gas industries were blessings to Louisiana. They not only increased employment directly but also caused new service industries to arise. The benefits spread to all sectors of business, including banking and real estate. The standard of living



Louisiana had many oil fields, gas fields, and pipelines by 1920.

increased throughout the state. However, unintended consequences at times cost the state dearly. A dependence on the oil and gas industries produced hardship during periods when the economy was weak. A lack of regulation, especially in the early years, caused long-lasting environmental damage. The construction of canals added to coastal erosion as rocks and soil were swept away by flowing water. Oil spills and leaks from waste pits contaminated soils and water supplies. Old and rusted pipelines, wells, and tanks caused pollution. The **environmental footprint** of the industries would have long-lasting consequences.

Vocabulary

“environmental footprint” (phrase)
the effect that an activity, person, or company has on the environment

in the fall by more rain in Oklahoma, Arkansas, and northern Louisiana.

Tributaries such as the Arkansas River, the Red River, and the Ohio River poured floodwaters into the Mississippi. Normally this would not have been a problem. When a river overflows its banks, the water spreads across natural drainage areas and is absorbed back into the ground. But **levees** had been built along most of the Mississippi River to prevent flooding. Unable to spread out as it traveled south toward the Gulf of Mexico, the water built up pressure within the river’s course.

Vocabulary

tributary, n. a stream that flows into larger streams, rivers, or bodies of water

levee, n. a wall or barrier built to prevent flooding

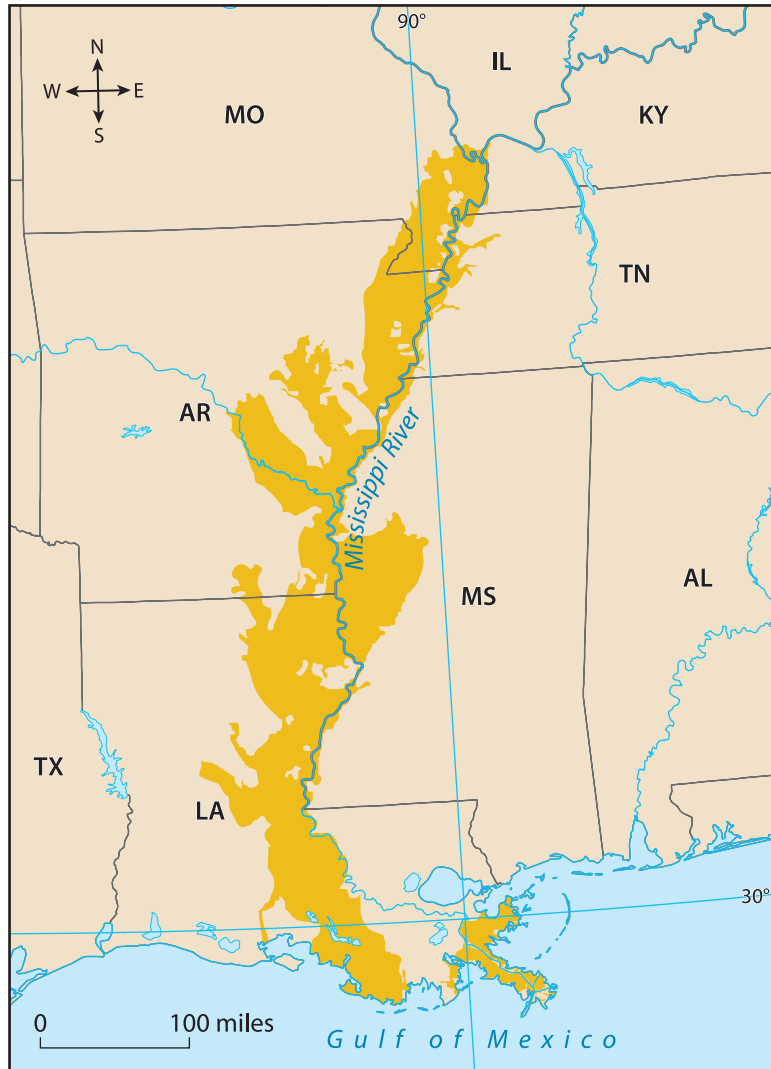


The Mississippi River Flood of 1927

A great flood occurred in the far north of Louisiana that almost washed away New Orleans in 1927. In 1926, the Midwest experienced heavy rainstorms in the Mississippi valley as far away as Kansas, Iowa, and Illinois. These were followed

By January 1927, the combined torrents rushing down the Mississippi River threatened to create unprecedented flood levels in southern Louisiana. And still the rain continued. Normal rainfall in New Orleans averaged 4.4 inches (11 cm) per month, but in February, the city received 11.6 inches (29 cm). Then it received more than 14 inches (35.5 cm) in a single day on April 15. If the levees broke, floods would destroy much of the city.

Great Mississippi River Flood, 1927



The Great Mississippi River Flood of 1927 covered more than 23,000 square miles (60,000 km²) and stretched from Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico.

Business leaders begged the governor to give the water a shortcut to the Gulf of Mexico by breaking down a levee below the city. To save New Orleans, the levee in St. Bernard Parish was dynamited. Ironically, this turned out to have been unnecessary. A different levee failed on its own, relieving the pressure, and New Orleans was saved naturally.

Writers' Corner

Imagine you live in a small town downstream from the levee that is going to be dynamited. Write a journal entry about your feelings.



The human and economic toll of the Great Flood of 1927 was staggering. From Illinois to Louisiana, it destroyed massive



An emergency tent camp can be seen in the background of this photograph of the Great Flood.

amounts of crops and drowned thousands of cattle. Some reports set the number of displaced people at more than one million. In Louisiana alone, the mighty Mississippi inundated an area roughly two hundred miles (322 km) long and up to one hundred miles (161 km) wide. The total number of deaths is unknown, but estimates range from 250 to 500 people. Financial losses reached \$400 million—that's an astounding \$6.8 billion in today's dollars. The effects of the disaster were heaviest on African Americans. These families made up 75 percent of the population in the Mississippi delta. Roughly half a

million African Americans lost their homes and livelihoods. Plantation owners did not want their supply of cheap labor to leave the area. They partnered with the American Red Cross, a medical and disaster relief charity founded in 1881, to set up tent camps. African Americans were pressured to work, first with shoring up levees, then with relief efforts, and later with cleaning up flooded areas. Their living conditions and provisions were inferior to those provided for white individuals. Thousands of African Americans left the camps—or never entered them at all—to move north.

When the levee in St. Bernard Parish was dynamited, compensation was promised to everyone whose homes would be destroyed. This did not happen. Some people received small payments, but others received nothing. Business leaders in New Orleans set up a fund to cover up to \$6 million in losses, which was only a fraction of the actual \$35 million in property losses. Most relief efforts were managed by the American Red Cross or local organizations. They set up tent cities and temporary housing for those left without homes by the flood.

The floodwaters finally drained into the Gulf of Mexico in June, but the aftermath of the flood brought about some long-term changes in the United States. Herbert Hoover, the secretary of commerce in 1928, called the flood the “greatest peace-time calamity in the history of the country.” In response, Congress passed



Conditions at the tent camps for African Americans were dismal.

the Flood Control Act of 1928. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built a series of huge **gates**, **spillways**, and reservoirs along the Mississippi in south-central and southeast Louisiana. Local communities were responsible for the operation and maintenance of these new projects.

Vocabulary

gate, n. a moveable barrier to control the flow of water through a channel

spillway, n. a channel to direct an overflow of water

This project caused physical changes. Whole communities were in the path of the spillways and had to be abandoned. The engineers also cut channels to straighten the river, changing the landscape of the Mississippi River valley. Social and political changes also ensued. Many African Americans, already subject to Jim Crow laws and harsh conditions in the South, found the flood to be the last straw. Thousands joined the Great Migration, which shifted the demographics of the country. Many also began changing their political loyalty from Republican to Democratic as new kinds of leaders emerged among Democrats.

Perhaps most significant for Louisiana was that the Great Flood greatly aided the rise of Huey Long. He took the side of the rural poor in southern Louisiana and denounced

the dynamiting of the St. Bernard Parish levee. His apparent sympathy and concern for the ordinary people of the state helped him gain the votes to become governor.

Huey Long's Political Career

Huey Long was born on August 30, 1893, in Winnfield, Louisiana. Winn Parish was a largely rural community. Those living in his community generally advocated for the rights and needs of the “common man.” He grew up listening to his neighbors’ various views on the politics of the day.

As a boy, Long had various jobs, which included delivering baked goods, sales, and from time to time, farming. He succeeded in entering Tulane University School of Law. He passed the bar exam at age twenty-one, became an attorney, and soon made his reputation as a champion of the working class. In 1918, he was elected to the Louisiana Railroad Commission and became its chairman four years later. After an unsuccessful run for governor in 1924, he was elected in 1928 by the largest margin in Louisiana’s history. A large part of his 1928 popularity was due to his criticism of the state government’s lack of response to the Great Flood of 1927.

As governor, Long weeded out conservative Bourbon supporters in the Democratic Party and replaced them with his own supporters. Firmly established in the governorship, the “Kingfish,” as Long was nicknamed, was able to carry out his **populist** agenda. This came to be known as “Longism,” referring both to the **political machine** Long built and

Vocabulary

populist, adj. supporting the rights and power of the people

“**political machine**” (phrase) an elite group that controls the actions of a political party



Huey Long was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine in April 1932.

to the philosophy behind it. Long believed that the government should protect the interests of poor, rural, and working-class citizens. He supported better education. He favored lower utility rates. He initiated a wide variety of public construction projects. He vigorously opposed monopolies and corporate power.

At the same time that he was implementing programs to help the people of Louisiana, Long was consolidating power for himself. The Bourbons had been corrupt, but Huey Long was not above blame. He appointed his cronies to leadership and judicial positions and tampered with elections. He frequently attacked the press, trying to control what journalists reported.

Why Kingfish?

Huey Long took his nickname from a popular character on the *Amos 'n' Andy* radio program. Kingfish, a friend of the two title characters, was an ambitious, boisterous man. Many of the episodes focused on his get-rich-quick schemes.

After he was elected senator, Huey Long told people in Washington, D.C., "I'm a small fish here in Washington, but I'm the Kingfish to the folks down in Louisiana."

In 1930, he launched his own newspaper, *Louisiana Progress*, with a one-sided editorial slant. As time went on, he dominated the state legislature and induced it to pass bills that increased his personal power. His foes sometimes compared him to demagogues such as Hitler or Mussolini. His rural and poor constituents continued to support him, however, possibly because his programs helped them in ways the Bourbons never had.

Huey Long had been attacking Standard Oil since his days on the Louisiana Railroad Commission. These attacks increased his popularity with the lower and middle classes. In 1929, he tried to impose new state taxes on oil companies in general and Standard Oil in particular. The company's allies in the Louisiana legislature, in turn, attempted to **impeach** Long on charges ranging from corruption to public profanity. Long's popularity and political connections enabled him to evade the charges, and the impeachment failed.

Vocabulary

impeach, v. to charge an officeholder with misconduct



An early Standard Oil gas station

When the legislature blocked a series of Long's construction projects in 1930, he formed a temporary alliance with his former rivals, the "Old Regulars" of the Louisiana Democrats, and the projects proceeded. The projects included a new state capitol, a new governor's mansion, and special support to Louisiana State University. Among Long's accomplishments in Louisiana were increased funds for education, providing free textbooks for schoolchildren,

free school busing, and adult literacy programs. His construction projects included roads, bridges, hospitals, schools, and more. He also tackled problematic issues in the 1921 constitution, such as the poll tax. The constitution was amended to eliminate these taxes, allowing greater numbers of poorer Louisianans to vote. He created a homestead tax exemption, reducing the tax burden of home ownership, but increased inheritance and income taxes that mainly affected the wealthy.

Think Twice



Huey Long did some questionable things, but some of his policies benefited the people of Louisiana. Do you think the good outweighs the bad? Why or why not?

Buoyed by his popularity with the voters, Long ran for the U.S. Senate and was elected. He promised to complete his term as governor before departing. He then managed to oust the lieutenant governor, a political enemy, and replace him with a man Long knew to be his own supporter. In January 1932, he resigned as governor and took up his duties as a U.S. senator. However, he made frequent visits to Louisiana and retained his influence in the state government. Many of his progressive

projects continued or expanded during his time in the Senate.



The New Deal in Louisiana

By 1932, the Great Depression was reaching its worst point. Unemployment reached 24 percent in 1932 and peaked at over 25 percent in 1933; almost half of all American families lived in poverty. As a freshman senator, Long resigned from his assigned committees and devoted himself to attacking both parties for failing to find solutions. In Long's opinion, the nation's economic collapse happened because of the great gap between the super-wealthy and everyone else. Playing up his own humble beginnings, Long even implied that President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a somewhat similar kind of Democrat, did not care about the welfare of common people because he had never been poor himself.

In fact, Roosevelt's New Deal, which you will read about in the next chapter, did bring relief to Louisiana at first. For example, some four hundred thousand Louisianans received aid from the Federal Emergency Relief Act, the Civil Works Act paid nearly \$15 million in wages to temporary workers in Louisiana in

1933–34, and the Civilian Conservation Corps employed more than forty-two thousand Louisianans. However, Long did not welcome federal interference in his state and made efforts to limit the influence of the New Deal. He tied up Public Works Administration projects in red tape, and fewer than forty were authorized before Long's death.

Long's answer to the New Deal was to establish his own program. Called "Share Our Wealth" (sometimes "Share the Wealth"), the program had the motto "Every Man a King." It promised to eliminate poverty in the United States through a number of bold initiatives.

Find Out the Facts



Research the value of 1935 dollars as compared to dollars today and the prices of some essentials such as food and housing.

Many among the desperate population embraced Long's proposals with enthusiasm. The Share Our Wealth movement had three million members by the end of 1934 and more than twice that many by the following summer. Local branches of the Share Our Wealth Society sprang up not just in Louisiana but across the United States as the movement went national.

Vocabulary

confiscate, v. to seize for the public treasury

Some people at the time credited the Share Our Wealth Society with forcing President Roosevelt to develop the so-called Second New Deal. Whereas the New Deal had been intended as a temporary measure, the Second New Deal introduced new programs that were intended to last. Some of these initiatives, such as Social Security, which provides financial assistance for retirees and people with disabilities, still exist today.

Huey Long intended to defeat Roosevelt and become the next president of the United States. For his part, Roosevelt considered Long to be one of the most dangerous men in America. Long changed the name of his newspaper from *Louisiana Progress* to *American Progress* and used it to try to convince the country that he was the only man who could solve the nation's problems. He was especially popular in rural areas of poor states, where people stood to gain greatly from his proposals. Unsurprisingly, he was extremely unpopular with the wealthy. In spring 1935, Long and his advisers believed he had a decent

The "Share Our Wealth" Program

- The government would **confiscate** (take or seize) any personal income exceeding \$1 million per year.
- The government would confiscate any personal fortune exceeding \$5 million.
- The government would confiscate any personal inheritance exceeding \$5 million.
- The revenue from these confiscations would be spent on benefits for all American citizens, including free education, homes, automobiles, and radios.
- Every family would receive a guaranteed annual income of two thousand dollars.
- Every citizen over the age of sixty would receive a pension.
- Every veteran would receive benefits and health care.
- Every citizen was entitled to free college education and vocational training.
- The work week would be limited to thirty hours.
- Every worker would receive a four-week vacation.
- The government would perform other actions to stabilize prices.

chance of winning many votes if he ran. But Huey Long did not live to see the election. Long was used to having the governor of Louisiana—his handpicked successor, Oscar K. Allen—call special sessions of the legislature. In these extra-legal sessions, Long would present “recommendations” for the legislators to pass. On Sunday, September 8, 1935, one such session included a recommendation to end the career of Judge Benjamin Pavy, a

Long opponent. During the evening, as Long strolled into a corridor of the capitol building, a man emerged from behind a pillar and shot the senator with a small pistol at close range. Long died two days later. The assassin was later identified as Dr. Carl Austin Weiss, Judge Pavy’s son-in-law.

Find Out the Facts



Research Huey Long’s radio programs and senate speeches. How did he present his policies and argue for them?



A poster promotes Huey Long’s work after his assassination. O. K. Allen was Long’s handpicked successor as governor of Louisiana.



A statue of Huey Long stands on the grounds of the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge.

PRIMARY SOURCE: PRESIDENT CALVIN COOLIDGE'S 1927 ANNUAL MESSAGE

In his 1927 annual message, President Calvin Coolidge warned Congress that the federal government should never become the "insurer of its citizens against the hazard of the elements."

It is necessary to look upon this emergency as a national disaster. It has been so treated from its inception. Our whole people have provided with great generosity for its relief. Most of the departments of the Federal Government have been engaged in the same effort. The governments of the afflicted areas, both State and municipal, can not be given too high praise for the courageous and helpful way in which they have come to the rescue of the people. If the sources directly chargeable can not meet the demand, the National Government should not fail to provide generous relief. This, however, does not mean restoration. The Government is not an insurer of its citizens against the hazard of the elements.

We shall always have flood and drought, heat and cold, earthquake and wind, lightning and tidal wave, which are all too constant in their afflictions. The Government does not undertake to reimburse its citizens for loss and damage incurred under such circumstances. It is chargeable, however, with the rebuilding of public works and the humanitarian duty of relieving its citizens from distress.

Source: Coolidge, Calvin. *State of the Union Addresses of Calvin Coolidge*. Washington, D.C., 1927; Project Gutenberg, December 3, 2014.

PRIMARY SOURCE: HUEY LONG'S "SHARE OUR WEALTH SOCIETY" ADDRESS

We have in America today more wealth, more goods, more food, more clothing, more houses than we ever had. We have everything in abundance here.

We have the farm problem, my friends, because we have too much cotton, because we have too much wheat, and have too much corn, and too much potatoes.

We have a home-loan problem, because we have too many houses, and yet nobody can buy them and live in them.

We have trouble, my friends, in the country, because we have too much money owing, the greatest indebtedness that has ever been given to civilization, where it has been shown that we are incapable of distributing the actual things that are here, because the people have not enough money to supply themselves with them, and because the greed of a few men is such that they think it is necessary that they own everything, and their pleasure consists in the starvation of the masses, and in their possessing things they cannot use, and their children cannot use, but who bask in the splendor of sunlight and wealth, casting darkness and despair and impressing it on everyone else. . . .

Now, we have organized a society, and we call it "Share Our Wealth Society," a society with the motto "every man a king."

Every man a king, so there would be no such things as a man or woman who did not have the necessities of life, who would not be dependent upon the whims and caprices and *ispe dixit* of the financial martyrs for a living.

Source: Long, Huey P. "Every Man a King" (Radio Address). February 23, 1934. Reprinted in U.S. Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 588, 591.

Chapter 3

The Great Depression



The Great Depression

The Depression was the longest and most severe economic downturn in American history. It was characterized by reduced industrial output, bank failures, high unemployment, and increased poverty. It began with the stock market crash of 1929 and ended in the late 1930s. By 1933, more than five thousand banks had failed, and the unemployment rate stood at 25 percent.

Vocabulary

“**stock market crash**” (phrase) a rapid and severe drop in stock prices

The Framing Question

What were the main events that occurred in the United States during the 1930s?



Many children of the Great Depression grew up in poverty.



From the Great Depression's beginning in 1929 until his presidential term ended in March 1933, President Herbert Hoover sought to address the economic collapse. His was a limited government response. He believed that the economy would pull out of recession and begin to grow again. It had done so many other times during business cycles in the past. President Hoover believed that direct government involvement in the economy would only make people dependent on the government. Of course, in 1929, no one had a crystal ball. People did not know the economy was entering a decade-long economic downturn.

But as 1929 turned into 1930 and 1931 gave way to 1932, the economy was not improving. In fact, it was getting worse. In 1932, President Hoover did embrace some government intervention. He set up a company, called the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, that allowed the federal government to lend \$2 billion to banks, railroads, and other private companies. That same year, he authorized \$300 million for the first federally funded relief and relief-oriented public works projects in American history. But these efforts, in the eyes of many people, were too little and too late. The economy remained in trouble.



President Hoover said he would provide relief, but voters would eventually choose Franklin Roosevelt instead.



Think Twice

Why was President Hoover reluctant to involve the federal government in a time of great crisis in America?

The Great Depression was, in part, sparked by the stock market crash that began on what became known as “Black Tuesday,” October 29, 1929. That day, panic rocked the stock market as stock prices plummeted. In the months before the stock market crash, anyone and everyone was able to and often did borrow money from bankers and other lenders to buy stocks, which is known as buying stock

on margin. People who bought stocks had pushed stock prices higher and higher in a speculative frenzy. Stock prices in late October 1929 were nearly double what they had been only a year and a half earlier. But over the months following Black Tuesday, stock prices fell. It was not until 1932 that the stock market hit bottom. By then, many stocks had lost 90 percent of their value. Shares of General Motors, for example, had sold for seventy-three dollars per share before the crash. In 1932, the same stocks sold for eight dollars per share. The stock market crash bankrupted many individual investors, and it collapsed corporate wealth as well.

Find Out the Facts



Research why rapidly rising and then falling stock prices caused the stock market to crash.

The broader American economy collapsed, too. From 1929 to 1933, the U.S. economy shrank by more than a third, as measured by **gross domestic product (GDP)**.

Vocabulary

gross domestic product (GDP), n. the value of all goods and services produced in one country during a specific period, usually a year or part of a year

The Great Depression began with the stock market crash, but there were other causes, too. They included overproduction, bank failures, **tariff** policy, and the **Federal Reserve's** monetary policy—a policy that had embraced an overly tight money supply.

Vocabulary

tariff, n. a system of fees placed on imported goods

Federal Reserve, n. the central bank of the United States

By 1929, American corporations were manufacturing more goods than consumers could purchase. Supply outpaced demand. Businesses needed to lay off workers until the goods they had already produced were sold. But newly unemployed workers were suddenly without paychecks. Without those paychecks, they had no income. This reduction in consumer demand led to a downward-spiraling economy. As workers lost their jobs and could not buy goods or purchase services, that meant that even more factory and service workers were laid off. And as they curtailed their buying habits, even more people lost their jobs. It was a frightening economic situation. How high would unemployment go?



Unemployed men line up outside a soup kitchen in New York during the Great Depression.

And what, if anything, should the nation's government do in this economic crisis?



Banking Crisis

In the 1920s, banks had invested their funds in **corporate bonds** and in loans to stock market speculators. But when the stock market collapsed, those loans and investments collapsed. More and more of the nation's banks failed. Panicked depositors started a **bank run**.

Vocabulary

corporate bond, n. a certificate from a business that promises interest paid on a loan

bank run, n. an event in which many customers take their money out of banks for fear that the banks will fail



A crowd of depositors gathers outside a bank during the Great Depression.

People lined up outside their banks, waiting to withdraw the money they had in their accounts. But banks simply ran out of money. They locked their doors. By 1933, more than five thousand banks had failed. And with those bank failures, millions of people lost their life savings. As the Great Depression worsened, the Federal Reserve, instead of loosening the money supply by making more money available to flow through the economy, tightened the money supply by increasing the **prime interest rate** it charged member banks. The higher prime interest

rate made it more difficult for businesses to borrow money. Some economists today believe that if the Federal Reserve had loosened rather than tightened monetary policy, the worst of the Great Depression might have been averted.

In 1930, Congress passed the Smoot-Hawley Tariff, which raised average tariff rates to nearly 60 percent. Congress had intended

Vocabulary

prime interest rate, n. the base rate of money charged by a bank for a loan

the new tariffs to help American businesses get back on their feet. They reasoned that if the federal government raised the price of imported goods by placing new tariffs on those goods, American consumers would buy American-made goods. That would support American workers in American factories. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff, however, backfired. Other nations placed retaliatory tariffs on American-made goods. That meant that overseas, the prices for American-made goods were so high that they did not sell. Without having intended it, Congress's Smoot-Hawley Tariff contributed to a collapse in international trade. The Great Depression was increasingly a worldwide problem.



Think Twice

How did retaliatory tariffs further contribute to the worsening economic depression?



The Dark Days

By early 1933, almost thirteen million people in the United States were out of work. The unemployment rate stood at an astonishing 25 percent. The unemployed sold apples on street corners, stood in long breadlines, or begged for food.

Those people who were able to keep their jobs often took large pay cuts.

Unemployed and unable to pay their mortgages or rents, many people were evicted from their homes. Some homeless families pitched tents or put up shacks in shantytowns—nicknamed “Hoovervilles”—in public parks. “Hoover flags” was the name given to trouser pockets pulled out to signal empty pockets and the fact that a person had no money. “Hoover blankets” was the name given to newspapers the homeless used as “blankets” against the cold. A Bonus Army of seventeen thousand veterans of the First World War (many



An unemployed worker selling apples outside of his “Hooverville” shanty home in the 1930s



Shantytowns like this one were called “Hoovervilles” during the Great Depression.

accompanied by family members) gathered in Washington, D.C., in mid-1932. They had come to ask that the federal government pay them the bonuses they had been promised. But President Hoover directed the military to forcefully turn them away.

Find Out the Facts



Research what life was like for the unemployed during the Great Depression.

Writers' Corner



Using your research, imagine you are a journalist living at this time who has been assigned to write a report on what it was like for those who struggled most during the Great Depression.



President Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal

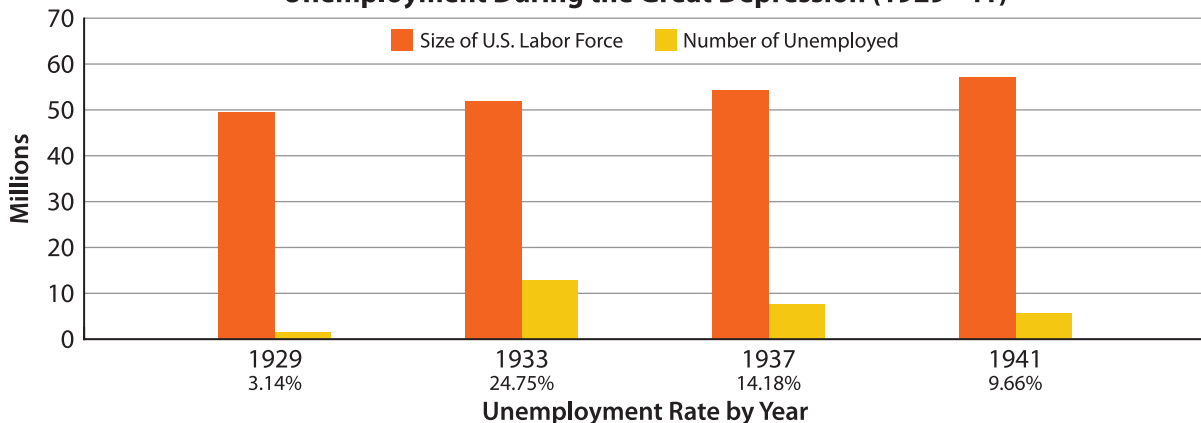
Think Twice



Why was the name *Hoover* used in the way described in this paragraph?

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) of New York was elected president in November 1932. FDR had grown up in a very

Unemployment During the Great Depression (1929–41)



The unemployment rate was at its highest in 1933, when Franklin Roosevelt began his first term as president.

wealthy household. He had spent his childhood on a large estate and was privately tutored at home. He did not know what it was like to experience poverty or hardship. But he was aware that most Americans did not have his privileges. And so when running for president, FDR had promised a New Deal for the American people. Initially, FDR was not sure what shape his “new deal” would take. But with the help of advisers—many of them professors at Columbia University—FDR crafted his New Deal. His plan consisted of a series of federal government programs intended to bring relief, recovery, and reform to the nation.

The New Deal marked a historic shift in the role of the federal government in the American economy and in the lives of the American people. FDR’s New Deal set the federal government on a new path of active involvement in the economy. It did this through job creation programs and through the creation of a variety of new federal agencies. By involving the federal government, FDR and the New Deal established the groundwork for the modern American **social welfare** system.

On March 4, 1933, in his first inaugural address, FDR sought to reassure the

American people. He famously said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” As president, FDR approached the Great Depression with “bold, persistent experimentation.” His approach to governing was, as he said, to “take a method and try it.” If an idea or public policy did not work, he would discard it and try another. The New Deal was a series of experimental government programs, each of which was introduced to address an economic or social problem. Some of those government initiatives remain with us to this day as laws, agencies, and public policies.

Think Twice



What do you think the statement “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” means?

As president, FDR delivered “fireside chats” over the radio. In his first fireside chat, he spoke directly to the American people and explained to them the actions he and Congress had taken to strengthen the nation’s banks.

Vocabulary

social welfare, n. a nation’s system for providing assistance to those in need



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivers one of his thirty fireside chats in Washington, D.C., on September 6, 1936.

The New Deal's many federal government programs brought relief in the form of food and jobs to the unemployed. With billions of dollars in government expenditures, FDR and Congress hoped to aid in the economy's recovery. In all of this, FDR and the Democratic Party—with the support of moderate Republicans—expanded the role of the federal government in America's economy and society and reshaped the nation's political culture. With the New Deal's many

federal expenditures and new government agencies, Americans came increasingly to hold the view that the welfare of the nation's citizens is a responsibility of the federal government.

Find Out the Facts



Find out the facts about Father Coughlin, his radio show, and the influence he had in America during the 1930s.



The First New Deal (1933–34)

FDR began his presidency with bold legislative action. In his first hundred days, from March through June 1933, Congress passed and FDR signed into law a broad range of initiatives in banking, industry, agriculture, and employment.

The Great Depression hit farmers especially hard. Successful new farming techniques, including gas-powered tractors and combines, had resulted in farmers being able to produce more wheat, corn, cotton, and other crops. But farmers' successful increases in crop output often did not lead to the increases in profits they expected. Instead, American farmers produced more crops and raised more livestock than

they could profitably sell at market. In consequence, agricultural prices collapsed.

Banks **foreclosed** when farmers were unable to repay loans, and many thousands of farming families lost their farms to bank foreclosures. It was in this context that the federal government set out to help farmers. In May 1933, at FDR's urging, Congress passed the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA). The AAA increased agricultural prices by paying farmers who, following new government guidelines, did not plant crops on parts of their lands. The AAA also

Vocabulary

foreclose, v. to seize, or take, a property because of failure to pay a loan









Low-income farm families work in the Newberry County Mattress Project Center, the site of a government relief program in South Carolina.

bought hogs from farmers and destroyed the animals. With less food available, prices increased. In this way, the federal government boosted agricultural prices and helped many farmers.

The federal government undertook a broad array of new initiatives. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) gave some three million young men federally funded jobs improving public lands, forests, and parks. The Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA) supplied states with money to use to distribute food and hire workers. The National Recovery Act (NRA) established a federal agency that worked with employers to set prices and wages. Section 7a of the NRA's codes protected collective bargaining rights for workers who wished to organize unions in their places of work.

The United States Banking Act of 1933 developed programs in support of the nation's banking system. The Glass–Steagall Act separated commercial banking from investment banking and created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC). The FDIC, which exists to this day, guarantees individuals that the federal government will repay them in the event that their local FDIC-insured bank goes out of business.

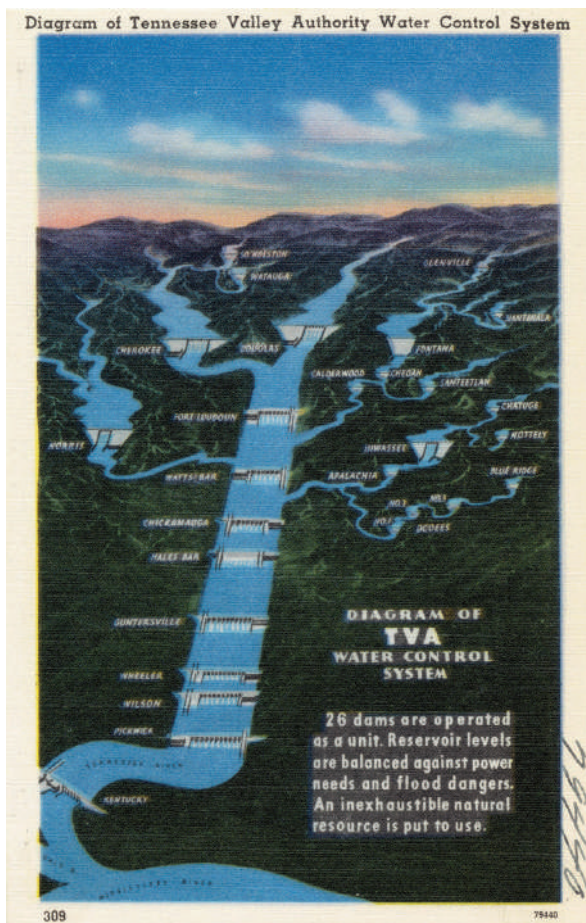
"Alphabet Agencies" Arising from the New Deal, 1930s

Agency	Dates	Authorization	Purpose	Actions	Accomplishments
 CCC	1933–42	Executive Order (New Deal)	reduce unemployment	forest management, flood control, conservation projects, development of state and national parks, forests, historic sites	provided work for three million young unmarried men
 TVA	1933–present	Tennessee Valley Authority Act	energy production, improved standard of living	dams, hydroelectric generating stations, flood control	cheap electricity, prime fishing/boating areas, mosquito eradication
 AAA	1933–42	Agricultural Adjustment Act (also called Farm Relief Bill)	limit farm production, reduce export surpluses, raise prices	mortgage loans, payments to farmers who limited planting, price regulation	more than doubled farm income, 1932–35; unintended: long-term trend from small farms to agribusiness
 NRA	1933–35	National Recovery Act	eliminate unfair business practices, reduce unemployment	establish codes for business practices (e.g., child labor, minimum wage, maximum hours)	improved labor conditions, aided collective bargaining and unionization
 PWA	1933–39	National Industrial Recovery Act	reduce unemployment, improve purchasing power	public works: schools, courthouses, city halls, public health facilities, roads, bridges, subways	\$4 billion in construction of public works, many still in use
 FRS	1933–99	Banking Act of 1933	safer use of bank assets, interbank control, prevention of undue speculation	commercial banks no longer allowed to underwrite securities, investment banks no longer allowed close connections with commercial banks	separated commercial banking from investment banking, tighter regulation of banks by Federal Reserve System, created FDIC
 FDIC	1933–present	Glass–Steagall Act	protect bank depositors, provide economic stability to banking system	pooled money from banks, insured deposits up to a set amount per year per person	provided insurance for funds deposited in checking and savings accounts in FDIC banks
 SEC	1934–present	Securities Exchange Act of 1934	regulation of all aspects of securities industry	register, regulate, oversee brokerage firms, agents, and self-regulatory organizations; requires periodic reporting	created SEC
 FHA	1934–present	National Housing Act	facilitate home financing, improve housing standards, increase employment	insure home mortgage loans, reduce foreclosures, create Federal National Mortgage Association	lowered down payments, lengthened repayment period, reduced repayment risk
 WPA	1935–39	Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935	reduce unemployment, improve purchasing power	public works (e.g., parks, roads, bridges, schools), oral histories, American music, public art installations, theatrical works	Federal Writers' Project Federal Theatre Project Federal Music Project Federal Arts Project Folklore Project
 WPA	1939–43	Same agency as Works Progress Administration; renamed in 1939			
 SSA	1935–present	Social Security Act	permanent national old-age pension system	monthly benefits to retirees, payroll tax on employers	regular income to seniors

President Roosevelt's New Deal introduced a number of government organizations that came to be known as the alphabet agencies.

In 1934, Congress created the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to protect investors. During the 1929 stock market crash, some unscrupulous firms sold their own stock holdings at the same time that they encouraged others to buy the same stock holdings. The SEC was established to stop such unfair trading practices. The SEC oversees the orderly and fair functioning of the stock market and other financial markets.

Another important early New Deal initiative was the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The TVA is a federal government-owned corporation. The TVA built dams and power-generating stations along rivers in the rural southern United States. TVA-built dams helped with flood control. TVA water-powered hydroelectric generating plants supplied electricity to homes and businesses in most of Tennessee and in portions of Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia.



The Tennessee Valley Authority water control system extended the length of the Tennessee River.

Think Twice



In times of great economic hardship, do you think the federal and local governments have a responsibility to assist people in need?



The Second New Deal (1935–38)

The second phase of the New Deal began in 1935. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA), also called the Wagner Act, created the National Labor Relations Board. This independent agency of the federal government protects the rights of workers to form unions and to bargain

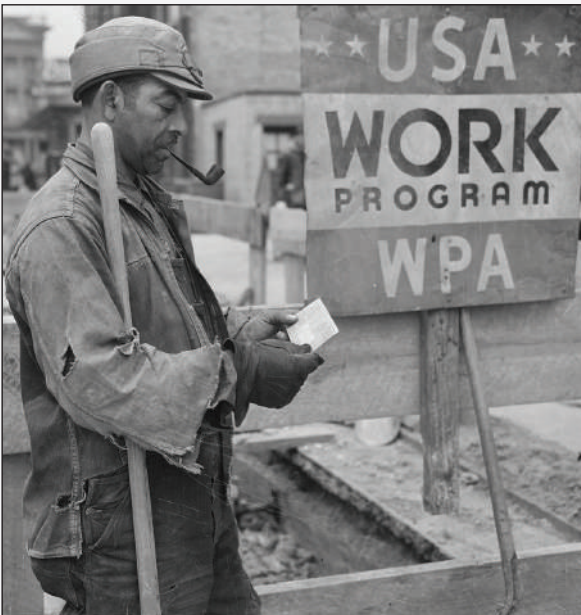
with their employers. The act forbids employers from harassing or intimidating union organizers or union members. The new protections for union workers helped union membership grow in the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1950s, about one in three American workers was in a union.

The 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act sought to establish fair federal labor standards for working people. It mandated the forty-hour workweek (with time and a half for overtime), established a federal minimum wage, and restricted child labor.

The Works Progress Administration provided employment for some 8.5 million men and women between

1935 and 1943. Construction projects of the WPA included roads, bridges, public buildings, parks, and airports. The agency also employed artists, writers, musicians, and actors to contribute to the cultural life of the country.

The Social Security Act of 1935 was a big deal among the New Deal's many initiatives. With it, President Roosevelt's administration and Congress crafted one of the cornerstones of the modern federal social welfare system. The Social Security Act requires working Americans to pay a portion of each of their paychecks into a federal Social Security fund. The Social Security fund sends elderly Americans money each month to help them support themselves in their retired years. Other provisions of the act offer support for the blind, disabled, and unemployed, and for impoverished single-parent families. Over time, the law has been amended to offer expanded supports. Today, just about all Americans and residents of the United States have a Social Security number.



An unidentified worker receives a paycheck from the federal government in 1939.

Find Out the Facts



Research what other countries provide by way of a social welfare system in comparison to the United States.

Roosevelt's Court Strategy

Buoyed by his November 1936 reelection to a second term as president, in early 1937, FDR proposed legislation to “pack the court.” Several major pieces of New Deal legislation had been blocked by the Supreme Court, which had ruled they were unconstitutional. Roosevelt and his supporters were unwilling to let the court overrule their agenda and the laws passed by Congress. So they came up with a plan to expand, or “pack,” the Supreme Court. FDR’s court-packing proposal sought to add an additional justice to the United States Supreme Court for each justice older than seventy. Under his proposal, the court could have grown from its traditional nine to as many as fifteen justices. FDR wanted to appoint new justices to the court in hopes that they would rule in favor of his New Deal legislation. But some Americans from across the political spectrum were appalled by his proposal. They saw it as an overreach by the executive, or an attack on the Constitution’s checks and balances. They claimed FDR was trying to manipulate the federal judiciary. While FDR did not add

new justices to the court and the “court-packing” proposal was dropped, the Supreme Court’s opposition to New Deal programs did lessen.

Find Out the Facts

Find out more about FDR’s court-packing proposal.



The Dust Bowl

During the 1930s, drought and dust storms turned much of the Great Plains into a “dust bowl.” This included areas of Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, and Nebraska. For years, farmers had been plowing up the native grasses of the plains. But those native grasses had held the soil in place for centuries. The Dust Bowl began in 1931, when the usual rains did not come. Year after year during the 1930s, parched and unanchored soil turned to dust. Windstorms picked up the loose dirt, turning it into giant clouds of dust. During dust storms, it could be difficult to see objects only a short distance away. Everything, indoors and outside, became covered in layers of dust. Giant dust clouds blackened



A massive dust storm billows toward Rolla, Kansas, during the Dust Bowl. This picture was taken from a water tower one hundred feet (30.5 m) high.

the skies. At times, these clouds of dust reached East Coast cities such as New York and Washington, D.C. In Oklahoma and elsewhere on the Great Plains, tens of thousands of families were forced to abandon their farms. Called “Okies,” because many came from Oklahoma, these poverty-stricken migrants sought work in California and other states. But this was during the 1930s, and these states were undergoing their own economic troubles in the Great Depression.

Dorothea Lange was a photographer. She recorded the lives of Dust Bowl migrants in poignant photographs.

Find Out the Facts



Research why the excessive plowing up of native grasses on the Great Plains caused such an environmental disaster.

John Steinbeck’s 1939 novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, movingly recounted the story of the Joad family as they made their way from Oklahoma to California in search of work. Woody Guthrie sang folk songs about Okies. His song “The Dust Bowl Blues” includes the lyrics “but when the dust gets high, you can’t even see the sky” and “I’ve seen the dust so black that I couldn’t see a thing.”



The Dust Bowl is the name for both the drought and the area it affected, which includes Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.



Dorothea Lange captured these drought refugees from Abilene, Texas, in 1936 as they set off for California to work in the fields there.

Writers' Corner

Imagine you are living on the Great Plains during the 1930s and a severe dust storm has just occurred. Write a description of what it was like.



The Growth of Unions

Union membership grew rapidly during the Great Depression. In 1935, John L. Lewis, longtime head of the United Mine Workers, organized the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The CIO is an umbrella organization of workers with different skill levels organized



Find Out the Facts

Research what life was like on the Great Plains during the period that brought terrible dust storms.

by industry. This was a new way to organize workers. The American Federation of Labor, founded in 1886, had been organizing skilled workers into craft unions for decades. In 1955, the two organizations merged into today's AFL-CIO. In 1936 and 1937, the United Auto Workers (UAW) held successful "sit-down strikes" in Cleveland, Ohio, and Flint, Michigan, against the General Motors automobile manufacturing company. The sit-down strikes catalyzed unionization in the auto industry.

Within several months of the strikes, the UAW's membership grew to half a million members. At times, labor actions turned violent or were violently suppressed. One such instance was the Memorial Day Massacre on May 30, 1937, when Chicago police shot and killed ten unarmed protesters during the Little Steel strike.

Think Twice



Why might a period of hardship lead to movements for change?

Upton Sinclair and Voices of Protest

Unemployment and poverty during the Great Depression gave rise to voices of protest. As you know, Senator Huey Long of Louisiana promoted a "Share Our Wealth" campaign. Long sought massive increases in government spending programs, an annual guaranteed family income, and a steep wealth tax.

Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* had led to the passage of the 1906 Meat Inspection Act. In 1934, Sinclair promoted End Poverty in California (EPIC), a program that called for guaranteed pensions, tax reform, and a massive public works program. Though Huey Long's and Upton Sinclair's initiatives were not adopted, both of their programs influenced FDR's New Deal legislation.

In the 1930s, the small Communist Party in the United States had ties to the Soviet Union. Members of the party worked—with limited success—to influence the labor movement, organize the unemployed against evictions from their homes, and support African Americans' civil rights.

PRIMARY SOURCE: PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS (MARCH 4, 1933)

This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. . . .

If I read the temper of our people correctly, we now realize as we have never realized before our interdependence on each other; that we cannot merely take but we must give as well; that if we are to go forward, we must move as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline, because without such discipline no progress is made, no leadership becomes effective. We are, I know, ready and willing to submit our lives and property to such discipline, because it makes possible a leadership which aims at a larger good. . . .

We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of national unity; with the clear consciousness of seeking old and precious moral values; with the clean satisfaction that comes from the stern performance of duty by old and young alike. We aim at the assurance of a rounded and permanent national life.

We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action. They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.

Source: Roosevelt, Franklin D. Inaugural Address. March 4, 1933. U.S. National Archives.

PRIMARY SOURCE: FDR ON DROUGHT CONDITIONS (1936)

I went primarily to see at first hand conditions in the drought states. . . .

I saw drought devastation in nine states. I talked with families who had lost their wheat crop, lost their corn crop, lost their livestock, lost the water in their well, lost their garden and come through to the end of the summer without one dollar of cash resources, facing a winter without feed or food—facing a planting season without seed to put in the ground. That was the extreme case, but there are thousands and thousands of families on western farms who share the same difficulties.

I saw cattlemen who because of lack of grass or lack of winter feed have been compelled to sell all but their breeding stock and will need help to carry even these through the coming winter. I saw livestock kept alive only because water had been brought to them long distances in tank cars. I saw other farm families who have not lost everything but who, because they have made only partial crops, must have some form of help if they are to continue farming next spring.

I shall never forget the fields of wheat so blasted by heat that they cannot be harvested. I shall never forget field after field of corn stunted, earless and stripped of leaves, for what the sun left the grasshoppers took. I saw brown pastures which would not keep a cow on fifty acres. . . .

. . . We have the option, in the case of families who need actual subsistence, of putting them on the dole or putting them to work. They do not want to go on the dole and they are one thousand percent right. We agree, therefore, that we must put them to work for a decent wage, and when we reach that decision we kill two birds with one stone, because these families will earn enough by working, not only to subsist themselves, but to buy food for their stock, and seed for next year's planting.

Source: Roosevelt, Franklin D. Excerpt from "Fireside Chat on Drought Conditions," September 6, 1936. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America.

PRIMARY SOURCE: HERBERT HOOVER: "THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROPOSED NEW DEAL" (1932)

This freedom of the individual creates of itself the necessity and the cheerful willingness of men to act cooperatively in a thousand ways and for every purpose as occasion arises; and it permits such voluntary cooperations to be dissolved as soon as they have served their purpose, to be replaced by new voluntary associations for new purposes. . . .

This is self-government by the people outside of Government; it is the most powerful development of individual freedom and equal opportunity that has taken place in the century and a half since our fundamental institutions were founded.

It is in the further development of this cooperation and a sense of its responsibility that we should find solution for many of our complex problems, and not by the extension of government into our economic and social life. The greatest function of government is to build up that cooperation, and its most resolute action should be to deny the extension of bureaucracy. . . .

The primary conception of this whole American system is not the regimentation of men but the cooperation of free men. It is founded upon the conception of responsibility of the individual to the community, of the responsibility of local government to the state, of the state to the National Government. . . .

Now, our American system is founded on a peculiar conception of self-government designed to maintain this equal opportunity to the individual, and through decentralization it brings about and maintains these responsibilities. The centralization of government will undermine responsibilities and will destroy the system itself. . . .

My countrymen, the proposals of our opponents represent a profound change in American life—less in concrete proposal, bad as that may be, than by implication and by evasion. Dominantly in their spirit they represent a radical departure from the foundations of 150 years which have made this the greatest nation in the world. This election is not a mere shift from the ins to the outs. It means deciding the direction our Nation will take over a century to come.

Source: Hoover, Herbert. Excerpt from "The Consequences of the Proposed New Deal." In *Addresses upon the American Road*. New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1932, pp. 1–19.

Glossary

A

assembly plant, n. a factory in which cars, machines, or other products are put together (5)

B

bank run, n. an event in which many customers take their money out of banks for fear that the banks will fail (41)

bootlegger, n. someone who supplies illegal alcoholic beverages (15)

C

celluloid film, n. flexible, transparent plastic film on which images are recorded (7)

clear-cut, v. to cut down all the trees in an area (24)

company town, n. a town that is completely dependent on a single firm for employment, housing, stores, and other necessities (24)

confiscate, v. to seize for the public treasury (34)

corporate bond, n. a certificate from a business that promises interest paid on a loan (41)

E

“environmental footprint” (phrase) the effect that an activity, person, or company has on the environment (26)

F

Federal Reserve, n. the central bank of the United States (41)

foreclose, v. to seize, or take, a property because of failure to pay a loan (47)

G

gangster, n. a member of a criminal organization (15)

gate, n. a moveable barrier to control the flow of water through a channel (29)

gross domestic product (GDP), n. the value of all goods and services produced in one country during a specific period, usually a year or part of a year (40)

I

impeach, v. to charge an officeholder with misconduct (31)

L

levee, n. a wall or barrier built to prevent flooding (26)

M

modernity, n. the state of being modern or up-to-date (2)

“moving assembly line” (phrase) a mechanical system in which a product moves through stages and workers each add a different part to it (5)

P

“political machine” (phrase) an elite group that controls the actions of a political party (30)

populist, adj. supporting the rights and power of the people (30)

prime interest rate, n. the base rate of money charged by a bank for a loan (42)

prohibition, n. the prevention of something, such as the sale of alcoholic beverages (15)

R

renaissance, n. a time of intense cultural and artistic rebirth (11)

S

salon, n. a fashionable gathering of creative people held at the home of a prominent person (12)

sector, n. a part or division (6)

social welfare, n. a nation’s system for providing assistance to those in need (45)

speakeasy, n. a nightclub where illegal beverages are sold (15)

spillway, n. a channel to direct an overflow of water (29)

“stock market crash” (phrase) a rapid and severe drop in stock prices (38)

subsidy, n. financial assistance given by a government to a person, group, or company (23)

suffrage, n. the right to vote (16)

switchboard, n. a panel on which switches or other connectors are used to complete electrical circuits (6)

T

tariff, n. a system of fees placed on imported goods (41)

“tax exemption” (phrase) immunity from paying tax on certain income (23)

ticker-tape parade, n. a parade held in a city in which decorative shredded paper is thrown onto the parade route (9)

tributary, n. a stream that flows into larger streams, rivers, or bodies of water (26)

V

virgin forest, n. an old-growth forest in its natural state (24)

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FDR Fireside Chat, Washington, DC, USA, 1936 (b/w photo) / Underwood Archives/ UIG / Bridgeman Images: 46

Ford assembly line, Detroit. 1924 (b/w photo)/ Private Collection/ Prismatic Pictures / Bridgeman Images: 5

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Trumpeter Louis Armstrong with the King Oliver's Creole Jazzband in Chicago in 1923 with Baby Dodds, Honore Dutry, King Oliver, Bill Johnson, Johnny Dodds (clarinet) and Lil Hardin Armstrong (Lillian Harding Armstrong, wife of Louis Armstrong) / American Photographer, (20th century) / American / Private Collection / Stefano Bianchetti / Bridgeman Images: 13

Unemployed men queuing outside a soup kitchen in New York, c1930, during the Great Depression. / Universal History Archive/ UIG / Bridgeman Images: 41

Unemployed worker selling apples outside of his 'Hooverville' shanty home, 1930s (b/w photo) / American Photographer, (20th century) / American / Private Collection / Peter Newark American Pictures / Bridgeman Images: Cover C, 43

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Women standing holding banners outside the White House Gate, Washington D.C. (b/w photo) / American Photographer, (20th century) / American / Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University / © Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard / Bridgeman Images: 18

World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo: 28, 42, 44

Zora Hurston beating the hountar, or mama drum. 1937 (photo) / American Photographer, (20th century) / American / Private Collection / Bridgeman Images: 12



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