

The Great Depression Begins

Section 2

Hardship and Suffering During the Depression

Terms and Names

shantytown A neighborhood where people live in shacks

soup kitchen Place where free food is served to the needy

bread line A line of people waiting for free food

Dust Bowl Area of the Great Plains made worthless for farming by drought and dust storms in the 1930s

direct relief Money or food given directly from the government to the needy

Before You Read

In the last section, you learned about the start of the Great Depression.

In this section, you will read about the hardships caused by the Depression.

As You Read

Use a Venn diagram to take notes on the effects of the Great Depression on farmers and city dwellers. Find the similarities and the differences.

THE DEPRESSION DEVASTATES PEOPLE'S LIVES (Pages 472–474)

How did the Depression affect people in cities and on farms?

The Depression brought suffering and hardship to many Americans. The hard economic times ruined many lives. Millions of people lost their jobs. Some went hungry or became homeless. Those who could not meet their housing payments were thrown out of their homes.

Cities across the country were full of these homeless people. Some slept in parks and wrapped themselves up in newspapers to keep warm. Others built **shantytowns**, where they lived in little shacks they made out of scrap material. Some ate in **soup kitchens**, where charities served meals to the needy. Those

who could not afford to buy food stood in **bread lines** to receive free food.

African Americans and Latino Americans who lived in the cities had a very hard time. They had a higher unemployment rate than whites. If they did have work, they were paid less than white workers.

There was even violence directed against African Americans and Latinos. Angry whites who had lost their jobs did not want to compete against these minority groups for the few jobs that were left. They sometimes attacked African Americans. They demanded that Latino Americans be sent back to the countries they came from.

The Depression hurt people in rural areas, too. Food prices continued to go down as the Depression deepened.

Section 2, continued

Farmers earned less and less. Many farm families could not meet their mortgage payments. More and more of them lost their farms. From 1929 to 1932, about 400,000 farmers lost their land.

To make matters worse, a long drought hit the Great Plains. There was little rain from Texas to North Dakota. Much of this area had been grassland that farmers broke up with their plows in order to grow crops.

The soil was now exhausted from over-farming. The grass that had once held the soil in place was gone. When powerful winds swept across the Great Plains, the soil simply blew away. This dry area of blowing soil was called the **Dust Bowl**. Huge dust storms covered the plains and blew dust as far away as the East Coast.

The hardest hit region included parts of Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. Many Oklahoma farmers packed up their belongings and started for California to look for work. They became migrant workers, moving from place to place to pick crops. Because so many of them came from Oklahoma, migrant workers were often called Okies.

1. How did people in the cities and in rural areas suffer during the Great Depression?

EFFECTS ON THE AMERICAN FAMILY (Pages 474–477)

How did the Depression affect families?

The Depression put a heavy strain on family life. Many families pulled together during the hard times. They shared what they earned. Instead of going out for entertainment, parents and children often

stayed home. They played board games or listened to the radio.

But some families broke apart under the strain of poverty and unemployment. Many men felt ashamed because they had lost their jobs. Some of them simply left their families and wandered the country looking for work.

Women tried to find work, too. But they were usually paid less than men. Many people complained that employers should not hire women. They thought that men should have the jobs instead. These people argued that men were the ones who supported families, so it was more important for them to have jobs.

Children suffered terribly from poverty and the break-up of families. Many children had poor diets and no health care. Their parents could not afford to buy healthy food or to pay doctor bills. Many children suffered from malnutrition and diet-related illnesses like rickets. Many children ran away from home, hopping rides aboard freight trains. It was exciting, but also dangerous. Many were robbed or killed by criminals or beaten by railroad guards.

During the early years of the Great Depression, the federal government did not give **direct relief**—cash or food directly to poor people. Charities and some city governments struggled to help. But they could not provide enough relief to keep people out of poverty.

Because so many people were out of work, cities and states collected less tax money. They had to cut their budgets for programs like child welfare. Some cities could not afford to keep their schools open for a full term. Many school boards shortened the school year. Other schools simply closed. Children often went to work to try to help their families survive.

Section 2, *continued*

The Great Depression caused great suffering. Rates of suicide and mental illness increased dramatically. Hardship forced young people to give up dreams of college.

While the Great Depression caused much suffering, it sometimes brought out the best in individuals, families, and communities. Many people shared

resources with their neighbors or gave food and clothing to the needy.

2. Describe two ways the Great Depression affected families.

Section 2, *continued*

As you read about how people coped with hard times, use the chart below to summarize the Great Depression's effects on various aspects of American life.

1. Employment
2. Housing
3. Farming
4. Race relations
5. Family life
6. Physical health
7. Emotional health