

Title: The Great Depression

Compelling Question

Does the government have the duty to help the needy?

New York State Social Studies Framework Key Idea

8.5 Great Depression: Economic and environmental disasters in the 1930s created hardships for many Americans. Amidst much debate about the appropriate role of government, President Franklin D. Roosevelt helped to create intensive government interventions in the United States economy and society. (8.5a, 8.5b, 8.5c)

Supporting Question 1

What economic conditions during the Great Depression made many Americans appear “needy”?

Supporting Question 2

What environmental conditions during the Great Depressions caused many economic and personal needs in the mid- west?

Supporting Question 3

Did the government’s programs do enough to fulfill the needs of all Americans?

Formative Performance Task

Students will view various sources to determine the effects of the Depression and identify on a graphic organizer groups or situations in which Americans were considered to be “needy” by completing a paragraph writing assignment.

Formative Performance Task

Students will view various photographs, a video, and read the song lyrics of Woody Guthrie. Student will create a song, poem or visual describing the conditions and impact of the Dust Bowl.

Formative Performance Task

Support the argument by viewing various New Deal Program posters and text based descriptions. Students will then rank the posters in order of significance or impact on the needy.

Featured Sources

Photograph of a “Hooverville/
“Shanty town”(Homeless)
“Migrant Mother, by Dorothea Lange
“Unemployment” by Ben Shahn
Frederick Lewis Allen,
Book excerpt from Since Yesterday
Ruth Poterfield, “Women Available” The Mercury

Featured Sources

“Dust Storm Disaster” & “Dust Bowl Blues”
History Channel web source
The Dust Bowl damage map

Featured Sources

Excerpt from F.D.R. Inaugural address (1933)
Social Security Administration Poster
F.D.R. Political Cartoon, medicine to heal Uncle Sam

Summative
Performance
Task

Develop a New Deal Posters displaying the most important aspect/plan that helped the needy during the Great Depression. Write a short response with evidence defending your choice.

Taking
Informed
Action

Students will analyze the economic crisis of 2009 and research the rise of pop up tent cities across America. Students will read an article from the New York Times and write a letter to the President. In the letter students will identify the problem and determine if Governmental assistance is requested.

Taking Informed Action Sources:

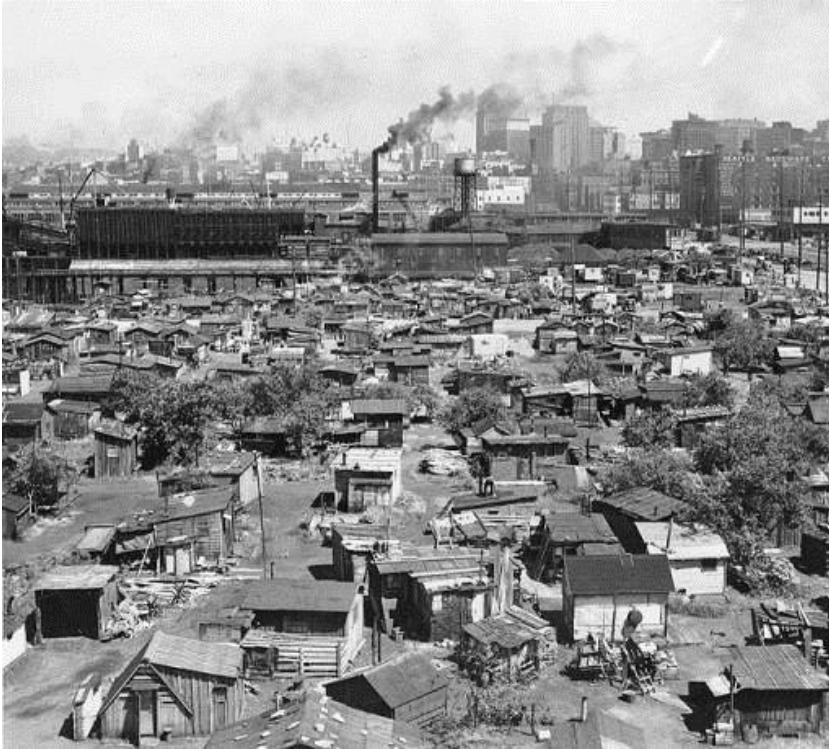
<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/26/us/26tents.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yz8LXq1q6iI>

By asking the compelling question “Does the government have the duty to help the needy?” students take on a topic with a long history and plenty of relevance for today. The inquiry prompts students to identify groups affected by the depression and programs initiated to support the “needy”.

Students examine a wide range of historical sources while focusing on questions concerning the extent to which government should take care of its people. In addition to the Key Idea listed earlier, this inquiry highlights the following Conceptual Understanding: . This inquiry is expected to take 5-6 40-minute class periods. 8.5 Great Depression: Economic and environmental disasters in the 1930s created hardships for many Americans. Amidst much debate about the appropriate role of government, President Franklin D. Roosevelt helped to create intensive government interventions in the United States economy and society. (8.5a, 8.5b, 8.5c)

<http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/lee/id/83>

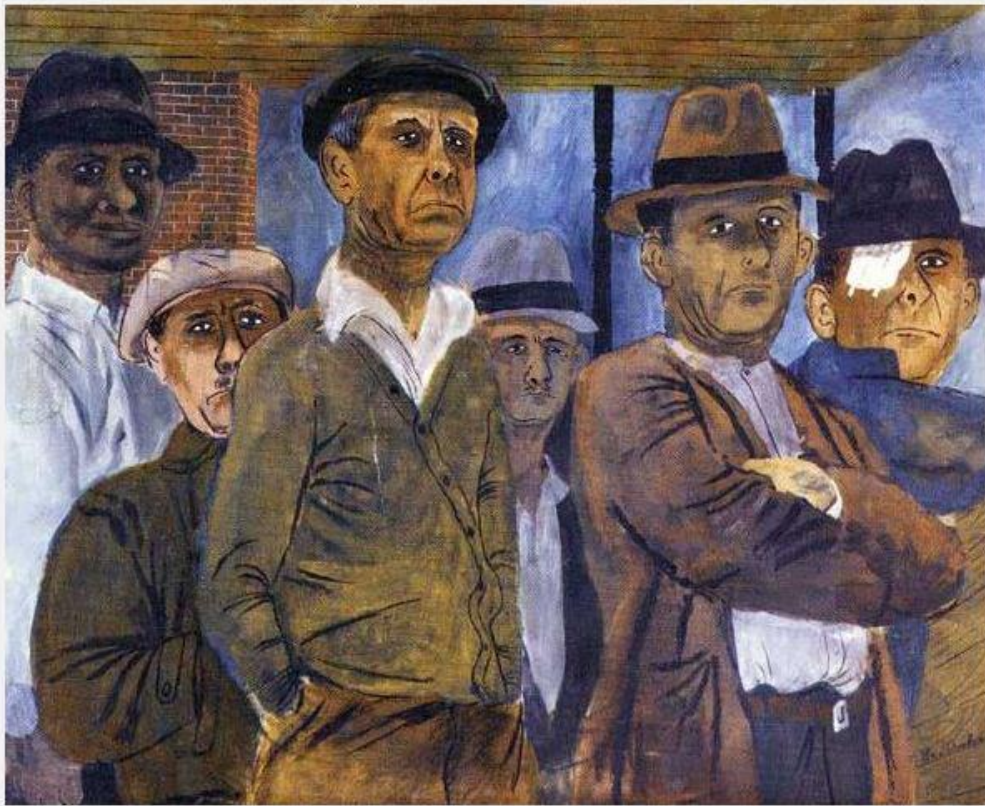


<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8b29516/>



I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.
(From: *Popular Photography*, Feb. 1960)
- Dorothea Lange

"Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936



Unemployment by Ben Shahn

Document 1 Frederick Lewis Allen writing about the Depression in his book *Since Yesterday*

But if you knew where to look, some of them [signs of the Depression] would begin to appear. First, the breadlines in the poorer districts. Second, those bleak settlements ironically known as "Hoovervilles" in the outskirts of the cities and on vacant lots—groups of makeshift shacks constructed out of packing boxes, scrap iron, anything that could be picked up free in a diligent combing of the city dumps: shacks in which men and sometimes whole families of evicted people were sleeping on automobile seats carried from auto-graveyards, warming themselves before fires of rubbish in grease drums. Third, the homeless people sleeping in doorways or on park benches, and going the rounds of the restaurants for leftover half-eaten biscuits, piecrusts, anything to keep the fires of life burning. . . . Among the comparatively well-to-do people of the country (those, let us say, whose pre-depression incomes had been over \$5,000 a year) the great majority were living on a reduced scale, for salary cuts had been extensive, especially since 1931, and dividends were dwindling. These people were discharging servants, or cutting servants' wages to a minimum, or in some cases "letting" a servant stay on without other compensation than board and lodging. . . . Alongside these men and women of the well-to-do classes whose fortunes had been merely reduced by the depression were others whose fortunes had been shattered. The crowd of men waiting for the 8:14 train at the prosperous suburb included many who had lost their jobs, and were going to town as usual not merely to look stubbornly and almost hopelessly for other work but also to keep up a bold front of activity. . . . There were architects and engineers bound for offices to which no clients had come in weeks. There were doctors who thought themselves lucky when a patient paid a bill.

This excerpt is from an article about Vera, a college-educated woman in New York City who was deeply affected by the Great Depression.

Vera

... Vera has never had a job. Almost every day of her first year in New York was spent in the discouraging routine all too familiar to the inexperienced college graduate looking for work. Employment agencies and prospective employers were usually indifferent to her plight when they discovered her lack of experience. And the money she spent on stamps for answering want ads was wasted; her letters never elicited [brought] replies.

For a time she lived on a small inheritance. But by the summer of 1934 it was gone and she seemed as far as ever from any hope of getting a job. Despite the intense heat and the growing nausea and weakness of slow starvation she continued to look for work for a month after her funds gave out. During this period she did not pay any rent for her furnished room and for food she depended almost entirely on occasional dinner invitations from her friends. There were not many of these invitations because she did not tell anyone how desperate her situation really was. Sometimes, though, she would borrow a dollar which usually went for carfare when she got so tired she couldn't walk further or, contrary to her better judgment, for food.

After four weeks of assuring her landlady that she would soon get a job and pay her rent she came home one night to find that all her clothing and personal belongings had disappeared during her absence. Frantic, she appealed to the landlady who told her that everything would be returned when she paid her rent. The value of her possessions was of course far greater than the amount of unpaid rent and she asked friends to loan her twelve dollars, the sum of her indebtedness. When she went home that night to redeem her possessions she found that a new lock had been put on the outside door of the house and that her key no longer fitted it. She rang the bell and knocked for a long time, but there was no answer. . . .

Source: Ruth L. Porterfield, "Women Available," *The American Mercury*, April 1935



<http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/dustbowl/photos/>

Dust Storm Disaster

(Also known as The Great Dust Storm)

Words and Music by Woody Guthrie

On the 14th day of April of 1935,
There struck the worst of dust storms that ever filled the sky.
You could see that dust storm comin', the cloud looked deathlike black,
And through our mighty nation, it left a dreadful track.

From Oklahoma City to the Arizona line,
Dakota and Nebraska to the lazy Rio Grande,
It fell across our city like a curtain of black rolled down,
We thought it was our judgement, we thought it was our doom.

The radio reported, we listened with alarm,
The wild and windy actions of this great mysterious storm;
From Albuquerque and Clovis, and all New Mexico,
They said it was the blackest that ever they had saw.

From old Dodge City, Kansas, the dust had rung their knell,
And a few more comrades sleeping on top of old Boot Hill.
From Denver, Colorado, they said it blew so strong,
They thought that they could hold out, but they didn't know how long.

Our relatives were huddled into their oil boom shacks,
And the children they was cryin' as it whistled through the cracks.
And the family it was crowded into their little room,
They thought the world had ended, and they thought it was their doom.

The storm took place at sundown, it lasted through the night,
When we looked out next morning, we saw a terrible sight.
We saw outside our window where wheat fields they had grown
Was now a rippling ocean of dust the wind had blown.

It covered up our fences, it covered up our barns,
It covered up our tractors in this wild and dusty storm.
We loaded our jalopies and piled our families in,
We rattled down that highway to never come back again.

Supporting Question #3 Resources:

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14473>

The American Presidency Project:

Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort. The joy and moral stimulation of work no longer must be forgotten in the mad chase of evanescent profits. These dark days will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow men.

Recognition of the falsity of material wealth as the standard of success goes hand in hand with the abandonment of the false belief that public office and high political position are to be valued only by the standards of pride of place and personal profit; and there must be an end to a conduct in banking and in business which too often has given to a sacred trust the likeness of callous and selfish wrongdoing. Small wonder that confidence languishes, for it thrives only on honesty, on honor, on the sacredness of obligations, on faithful protection, on unselfish performance; without them it cannot live. Restoration calls, however, not for changes in ethics alone. This Nation asks for action, and action now.

Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. This is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the Government itself, treating the task as we would treat the emergency of a war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects to stimulate and reorganize the use of our natural resources.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/acd1996000384/PP/>



New Deal Slide Show:

<http://www.history.com/topics/new-deal/pictures/new-deal-programs/wpa-road-construction-project>