

Crime and Criminals

At first you may think that the tough times of the Great Depression would cause people to turn to crime, however, that wasn't necessarily the case. Although there aren't a lot of crime statistics from the era, most historians agree that crime rates did not increase during the Great Depression. Some suggest that crime even went down. This may have been because so many people were hard up, they were less likely to steal from each other.

Crime in the Movies

Crime became somewhat glorified by the movies at the start of the Great Depression. Gangster movies such as Scarface and The Public Enemy made being a criminal look cool and a good way to make a living. Around 1934, new laws were put in place that put restrictions on movies. One rule was that movies could not make criminals look like heroes.

Famous 1930s Criminals

Organized crime leaders and bank robbers often made the front page news. Many criminals became very famous during the Great Depression. In some cases, people looked at them as heroes. This was especially true with bank robbers as many people blamed greedy banks for taking away their homes and for causing the Great Depression.

- Al Capone - Al Capone was an organized crime boss in Chicago. He became rich providing illegal alcohol during prohibition (when alcohol was illegal). Many people thought of Capone as a "Robin Hood" type figure because he gave to charities and helped the poor. Capone was sent to federal prison in 1932 for tax evasion.
- Bonnie and Clyde - Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow traveled with their gang throughout the Midwest robbing banks, stores, and gas stations. Newspapers followed their exploits making them famous throughout America until they were gunned down by police in 1934.
- John Dillinger - John Dillinger was a famous bank robber during the Great Depression. Many people looked at him as more of a hero than a villain because he mostly robbed banks. Dillinger and his gang robbed at least 24 banks before he was gunned down in 1934.
- Other - Other famous Depression-era criminals included Pretty Boy Floyd, Baby Face Nelson, Baron Lamm, and Slick Willie Sutton.

Organized Crime

Organized crime had become a major problem in the 1920s due to prohibition. Even after prohibition was ended in 1933, the gangs that formed were still around. They continued to operate, but in different areas such as gambling and drugs. Crowd Violence Crowd violence and mobs were a problem in the early part of the Great Depression. There was a clash between police and communist marchers in New York City in 1930. There were also food riots that occurred in many cities in 1930 and 1931. In 1932, around 20,000 World War I veterans called the Bonus Army marched on Washington D.C. asking for their bonus pay. When President Hoover had them removed, several were injured or killed in the clash. The crowd violence eased once Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected.

