**CHAPTER 22**

**The Great Depression and the New Deal**

**Learning Outcomes**

* 1. Explain the underlying causes of the economic depression, and evaluate President Hoover’s attempts to help the economy recover.

**Objectives**

1. Describe the underlying weaknesses in America’s economy and in the world economic situation that contributed to making the Depression a worldwide one, and explain how that helped make the situation in America so severe.
2. Discuss the actions that President Hoover tried to alleviate the Depression, and analyze the reasons for his failure.
   1. Describe the experiences of both urban and rural Americans during the Great Depression, and explain ways in which the Great Depression affected American politics.

**Objectives**

1. Describe the effects of the Depression on both urban and rural residents, and account for the differences between the two groups.
2. Discuss the various ways in which the Depression impacted America’s popular culture, including both ways in which ordinary Americans tried to cope and also the ways in which artists and writers used their talents to depict the economic woes of the nation.
3. Discuss some of the most significant events of the early years of the Depression, including the Communist Party and the Bonus Army, and assess their role in the election of 1932.
   1. Evaluate FDR’s actions designed to alleviate the effects of the economic decline, and discuss the opposition he faced.

**Objectives**

1. Describe the various actions taken by FDR upon his inauguration, the period known as the First New Deal, and analyze the effect he had on the American people.
2. List and discuss the most outspoken critics of FDR, both from the right and from the left, and explain what those on the left thought should be done to “fix” the Depression.
3. Discuss the ways the “Second” New Deal differed from the first, listing and describing specific examples.
   1. Discuss the most significant long-term effects of the New Deal.

**Objectives**

1. Explain how some of the New Deal programs were actually used to capture details of the Depression for posterity.
2. Assess the effect of the Depression on crime in America.
3. Discuss the changes effected by the New Deal that brought long-term benefits to the American labor department.
4. Assess the impact of the Depression and the New Deal programs on American politics.

**Chapter Summary**

Arguably, no two decades in American history were more different from each other than were the 1920s and the 1930s. Assuming the presidency in 1929, Herbert Hoover, like the majority of Americans, had no idea what was in store for the country. In less than a year the stock market had crashed, fortunes had disappeared, and unemployment had soared. All economics statistics demonstrated that America was in an economic freefall, the likes of which it had never experienced. The crisis called for a greater level of government involvement than Hoover would be willing to commit to. His last minute responses to the Depression were not enough to convince Americans that he had the best plan to move the country forward.

For the vast majority of Americans, the Depression greatly impacted all aspects of life. Urban communities, in particular African Americans, experienced significant job losses and starvation conditions. Rural America suffered through major price losses and a major ecological disaster, the Dust Bowl.

As the American economy worsened in the 1920s and 1930s, local and federal officials, including labor leaders and relief workers, threatened and publicly abused widespread numbers of Mexican Americans, hoping they would return to their countries of origin and preserve what jobs there were for white Americans. The federal government had greatly increased the number of U.S. Border Patrol agents in the late 1920s and early 1930s, making the anti-immigrant threat potent. The result was a series of public raids in predominantly Mexican American communities during which large numbers of Mexicans and Mexican Americans were arrested and given a choice: return to their nation of origin or face expensive legal proceedings. Most simply chose to repatriate.

Popular culture, primarily movies and radio, kept Americans entertained even as some major writers adopted a more leftward tilt to their works. Dire conditions prompted a brief but notable interest in the Communist Party and its position of equality among the races. Disgruntled veterans and their families clashed with U.S. Army forces in D.C., as they hoped to trade future payoffs for needed assistance. This Bonus Army clash and the Depression spelled the end of Hoover’s term.

Roosevelt declared a four-day national bank holiday and summoned Congress into special session to deal with the worsening situation. These two actions signaled the beginning of a series of laws and programs intended to end the Depression. Collectively called the “New Deal,” these measures were designed to regulate the economy, provide for national recovery, and create a social safety net for all Americans. The New Deal was a collection of initiatives, each aiming to address political, economic, and social demands all at once. Once enacted, the programs of the New Deal expanded the role of the federal government into the economic lives of ordinary Americans to an unprecedented degree.

Roosevelt faced criticism from economic conservatives, white racists, and radical leftists about the scope of these programs. In the face of a minimal impact on the economy, FDR created a Second New Deal mostly aimed at creating jobs and increasing the social safety net for people. After a series of encounters with the Supreme Court, FDR overstepped his authority in his attempts to reshape the highest court in the land, and thus lost political support for new New Deals.

The New Deal provided both opportunities and barriers for Americans. Artists and architects found venues for political and artistic expressions. Criminal networks faced enhanced resistance from federal forces. For laborers, politics and work issues often were conflated. Minorities faced continued and increased segregation from white Americans. However, Indians mostly benefited from new government policies directed toward preserving Native American culture. New Deal policies faced major gender biases as women were subjected to conditions that did not apply to men. In the long run, war, not the New Deal, ended the Depression. But afterward the federal government had much greater control over the everyday lives of Americans—a situation that has not changed.

**Chapter Outline**

I. The Economics and Politics of Depression

* 1. Statistics
  2. Hoover

II. The Depression Experience in America

1. Urban America
2. African American Neighborhoods
3. Hunger
4. Rural America
5. Mexican Repatriation
6. Cultural Politics
7. Movies
8. Writers
9. Radio
10. Radicalizing Politics
11. Communist Party
12. The Bonus Army
13. The Election of 1932

III. The New Deal

1. The First New Deal
   1. Relief
   2. Recovery
   3. Reform
   4. The Hundred Days
2. Critics of the First New Deal
   1. Criticism from the Republicans
   2. Criticism from Conservative Democrats
   3. Criticism from the Left
   4. Criticism from the Courts
3. The Second New Deal
   1. More Jobs
   2. Labor Support
   3. The Social Safety Net
   4. Attacks on the Wealthy and Large Corporations
   5. The New Deal’s Peak: 1935–1936
4. Decline and Consolidation
   1. Court Packing
   2. Consolidation

IV. The Effects of the New Deal

1. Culture
2. Crime
3. Labor
4. Politics
5. Continued Segregation
6. The Indian New Deal
7. Women

V. Looking Ahead…

**Suggested Lecture Topics**

1. The Bonus Army Marches on Washington
2. Roosevelt’s “Fireside Chats” Bring Hope to America
3. “I’ll Vote for That!”—FDR’s First Hundred Days Make History
4. From Slave Narratives to Literacy Programs: Writers’ Programs of the Works Progress Administration
5. Wasthe New Deal Socialism in Disguise? A Twenty-First Century Analysis
6. “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” The Depression in Song Lyrics

(22-1). Three events were of paramount importance in causing the Great Depression:

1. The stock market crash
2. Internal weaknesses in the American economy
3. The European economy

Have students organized in groups discuss one specific Reason Why. Each group should come up with potential solutions to fix that specific reason. Then, instructors can have each group either report their proposed solution to the class (and be voted on by classmates) or turn it in as an in-class writing assignment. Alternatively, current economic conditions offer an excellent opportunity for a comparison between now and then.

**The Reasons Why**

**Research Topics—Projects and Papers**

Students might choose to complete a project to be presented in class or to write a more traditional research paper. Or instructors could decide which task they prefer to have them do. Below are a few topics that are relevant to this chapter. Instructors may, of course, choose to develop their own topics.

* 1. The Alphabet Agencies: Compile a list of acronyms for every agency, act, and organization that emerged from the New Deal. Divide them into three categories: Relief; Recovery; and Reform. Include the date that each was enacted. Try to determine the best ways to categorize the different phases of the Roosevelt years.
  2. Debate the issues of the Bonus Army of World War I veterans who marched in Washington in the spring of 1932. Instructors can use the following sites to give students a place to begin their preparations for debate. Divide the class into two groups. One side will argue for early payment of the bonus, and the other side will argue against such payment. The instructor may provide as much or as little extra information as is deemed necessary.
     1. “The Bonus March: Herbert Hoover’s View,” HistoryNet.com

<http://www.historynet.com/the-bonus-march-herbert-hoovers-view.htm>

* + 1. Kast, Sheilah. “Soldier Against Soldier: The Story of the Bonus Army,” NPR books. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4494446>
  1. FDR and the Congress: The First Administration. Write a 2–3-page paper, examining the relationship between FDR and members of Congress. Ask students to include their analysis of why they got along as they did.

**Additional www Resources**

“Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC),” *United States History*.

<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1586.html>

*New Deal Network*. Sponsored by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute website.

<http://newdeal.feri.org/index.htm>

Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard. “New Deal Cultural Programs: Experiments in Cultural Democracy,” *The Institute for Cultural Democracy.*

<http://www.wwcd.org/policy/US/newdeal.html>

**Primary Source Discussions**

**Assignment Name: Contemporary History of Depression-Era Harlem**

*Introduction*: Although the Depression-era Federal Writers’ Project is best known for its transcripts of slave narratives, interviewers also covered other topics. Here you have an interview with an African American named Frank Byrd. The title states that the interview was “unedited,” but it is not written in the first person. Be on the lookout for racist statements made by the interview.

*Visit URL*: http://www.loc.gov/collection/federal-writers-project/?q=221011010

[Read a brief contemporary history of Depression-era Harlem](http://www.loc.gov/collection/federal-writers-project/?q=221011010) and then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.

*Reflection Questions*:

1. Why were the rents in Harlem higher than those in other parts of New York?
2. What was a “rent party”? What was a typical one like?
3. Note the statements scattered through the paper which indicate that the interviewer held racist views.
4. What do you think the writer meant by the next-to-last sentence of this paper: “It was too dangerous to try to sell whiskey after it became legal”?

**Assignment Name: WPA Slave Narratives**

*Introduction*: This is the site that was used to describe the lives of slaves in an earlier chapter. When you visit the site for this chapter, concentrate on the photos, the questions asked by the interviewers, and the techniques used to get these slave narratives recorded before the last slave generation died out.

*Visit URL*: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/wpahome.html

[Read several of the WPA slave narratives](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/wpahome.html) and then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.

1. How effective are the photos that accompany the narratives? Were these projects a worthwhile use of federal funds during a time of national depression? What purpose did they serve?
2. What do you consider the best aspect of this project? What issues would you have liked to see the interviewers address that they did not?