The **Great Depression** was a severe worldwide economic downturn that began in the **United States** following the **stock market crash of October 1929**, often called "Black Tuesday." It lasted roughly a decade, from 1929 to the late 1930s or early 1940s, depending on the country.

**Causes:**

1. **Stock Market Speculation**: In the 1920s, many people bought stocks on margin (borrowed money), creating an unsustainable bubble.
2. **Bank Failures**: After the crash, widespread panic led to bank runs, causing many banks to fail and wiping out savings.
3. **Overproduction**: Industries and agriculture overproduced goods, leading to falling prices and unsold inventory.
4. **Trade Policies**: High tariffs like the **Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act (1930)** restricted international trade and worsened the global economy.
5. **Income Inequality**: Wealth was concentrated among a small elite, limiting the purchasing power of most people.
6. **Monetary Policies**: The Federal Reserve failed to inject liquidity into the economy, leading to deflation and reduced spending.

**Effects:**

* **Unemployment**: At its peak in the U.S., unemployment rose to 25%.
* **Homelessness**: Many families lost their homes, and shantytowns called "Hoovervilles" sprang up.
* **Global Impact**: The Depression affected nearly every country, with sharp declines in industrial production, trade, and employment worldwide.
* **Political Shifts**: Economic hardship fueled political changes, such as the rise of authoritarian regimes in Europe, including Nazi Germany.
* **Social Consequences**: Families suffered immense hardships, with widespread poverty and a breakdown of social norms.