

US History

The Great Depression & The New Deal

Learning Target:

I can compare and contrast the hardships that urban and rural Americans faced during the depression

3. The American Worker And His Family

A Lack of Work –

“These unemployed are dead men. They are ghosts that walk the streets.”

-Anonymous Observer

“Everybody in America was looking for work.” – Langston Hughes, Poet

Statistics –

-1929 – 1.5 million Americans were unemployed

-1933 – 15 million Americans were unemployed

-Chicago, ILL – 50% of workforce was unemployed

-Toledo, OH – 80% of workforce was unemployed

Wages & Hours –

-Wages fell drastically for the people who kept their jobs

-Often as low as 10 cents an hour

-Factory workers annual income fell by 1/3 between 1929 and 1933

-Workers also had their hours cut

-Rather than lay experienced employees off they cut the hours worked

-Employees often only worked one day a week

-With wages and hours decreasing many immigrants stopped coming to the US

The American Worker –

African American Labor –

-Blacks were always the first let go by factories when cuts were made

-Many believed that blacks should not be hired as long as there are whites without work

Women Labor –

-Many women were hired because they could be paid less

-Most employed as office workers and domestic servants

-The percentage of women in the workforce actually increased in the 1930s

The Apple –

- Many unemployed workers began selling apples on the street
- Gave them the feeling of self-reliance and a source of income
- Sold at 5 cents apiece and on a good day you might make \$1.15

Psychological Effects –

- Depression described the economy and the people of the United States
 - 20,000 American committed suicide in 1932; a 28% increase over 1929
- Working men who had defined themselves by their jobs did not know what to do
 - Often seen wandering the streets with a confused look
 - Many felt extreme shame and guilt
- Reasons for shame and guilt –
 - Being unemployed
 - Losing their business or home
 - Inability to provide for their families

The American Family –

The Restructuring of the Family –

- The depression caused many families to change and make sacrifices
- Many extended relatives doubled up in houses
- Young adults moved back in with their parents
- Many women became the breadwinner and men took care of the house

Strains on the Family –

- Economic hardships took its toll on many families
- Some marriages broke apart and many never happened
 - Marriage and birth rate declined drastically
 - Many felt it just wasn't a good time to get married or have children
- Women often very hard hit by the depression
 - Had to quietly face the challenges of preparing food and clothing