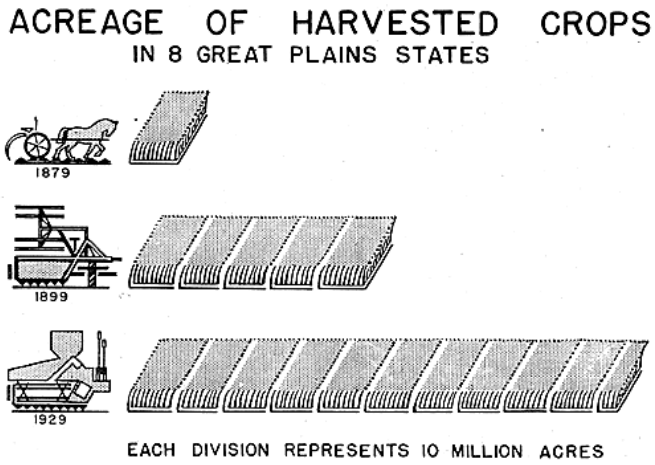
Acreage of Harvested Crops in the Great Plains, 1879-1929

In 1936, President Roosevelt formed a committee of scientists, agricultural engineers, and government officials to assess the causes of–and possible remedies to–the drought conditions that were plaguing the Great Plains region. In the following section of their report, the committee uses evidence to show how excessive plowing and overgrazing had removed the grasses which naturally anchored the soil in place, thereby contributing to the Dust Bowl conditions in the 1930s.



One primary source of disaster has been the destruction of millions of acres of this natural cover, an act which in such a series of dry years as that through which we are now passing left the loose soil exposed to the winds. This destruction has been caused partly by over grazing, partly by excessive plowing. It has been an accompaniment of settlement, intensified in operation and effect since the World War. In eight states lying partly within the region the area in harvested crops has increased as follows:

1879 12,200,000 acres
1899 53,500,000 acres
1909 71,6000,000 acres
1919 87,800,000 acres
1929 103,200,000 acres

Source: Morris Cooke et al, *Report of the Great Plains Drought Area Committee,* (Hopkins Papers, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library) Box 13. http://newdeal.feri.org/hopkins/hop27.htm

Life on a Farm

Caroline Henderson lived and farmed in the Oklahoma Panhandle from 1907 until her death in 1966. She left detailed written descriptions of life in the Great Plains and published articles for Atlantic Monthly *on harsh living conditions during the Great Depression. In the following letter, written in 1916 to a friend's mother, she describes farm life before the Depression hit, including the healthy livestock she and her family raised and a significant new home improvement: indoor plumbing.*

We have a nice little bunch of cattle now or at least the beginning of one–24 head, all cows and heifers but four. They were getting pretty tired of dry feed but are gaining in milk since I have been watching them on the rye. Last fall we started to name the calves according to the alphabet and had Sweet-Alice and Annabel Lee. This spring we have Ben Bolt, Booker, Beauty, Buttercup and a new comer yesterday who is not yet named. Cream has kept up in price better than usual. Until just recently we have been receiving 30 cents per gallon, and eggs, astonishing to tell, are still 15 cents per dozen! Usually by this time they have been down to 10 or sometimes 8 ⅓. The cream and eggs keep a little ahead of the grocery bill so that is quite a help. I wonder sometimes how really poor people in towns manage to get enough to eat these days when nearly everything is so high in price.

We have made one improvement this spring which is a great help to me–that is getting the water pumped into the house. I suppose we shouldn't have dared to do it if we had known how the season was going to be but after all, I am glad we did for it saves so much times and strength. We are fortunate in having kept over enough grain and I think enough roughage to winter the stock if we can only have a little pasture for them this summer.

Source: Caroline Henderson, "'Letter to Mrs. Alden, May 18, 1916," in *Letters from the Dust Bowl*, Alvin O. Turner, ed., University of Oklahoma Press, 2001, pg. 78.

Account of Farming Practices in Oklahoma

Byrd Monford Morgan was born in 1924 in Oklahoma. His family moved to California when he was in sixth grade and leased a farm in Madera County during the Depression. In this oral history (recorded in 1981), Morgan describes how farming practices helped cause the Dust Bowl in the Great Plains.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a little bit more about the farming practices? I heard that most of the farmers in Oklahoma at that time didn't practice crop rotation.

Morgan: They didn't practice crop rotation. They didn't seem to realize that they were losing the top soil by not terracing on slopes to keep it from washing away. I've seen great gulches and ravines washed down at the ends of the fields that came to too much of a drop in elevation. Lots of top soil washed away. In the western part of the country that had happened. They'd farmed the same thing too many years in a row. When the drought did come the wind blew the top soil away. If the wheat doesn't grow the dirt just gets powdery and then the wind blows it away. You have a lot of wind in that country and just because you have drought years it doesn't mean that you can't have a downpour occasionally. In that latitude you have a lot of violent weather where your southern and northern climates clash at certain times of the year. You can have a downpour of four or five inches of rain in two or three hours and still be drought year.

Interviewer: But you feel that because of the farming methods when the winds came they did lose a lot of the top soil?

Morgan: Oh, definitely. They should never have grown cotton in Oklahoma in the first place. Cotton is very hard on soil. It takes pretty good land to start out with. They'd start raising cotton just year after year.

Source: "Interview with Byrd Monford Morgan," California State College, Bakersfield - *California Odyssey: The 1930s Migration to the South San Joaquin Valley*, pg. 11
http://www.csub.edu/library/_files/DB_files/Morgan131Rev.pdf

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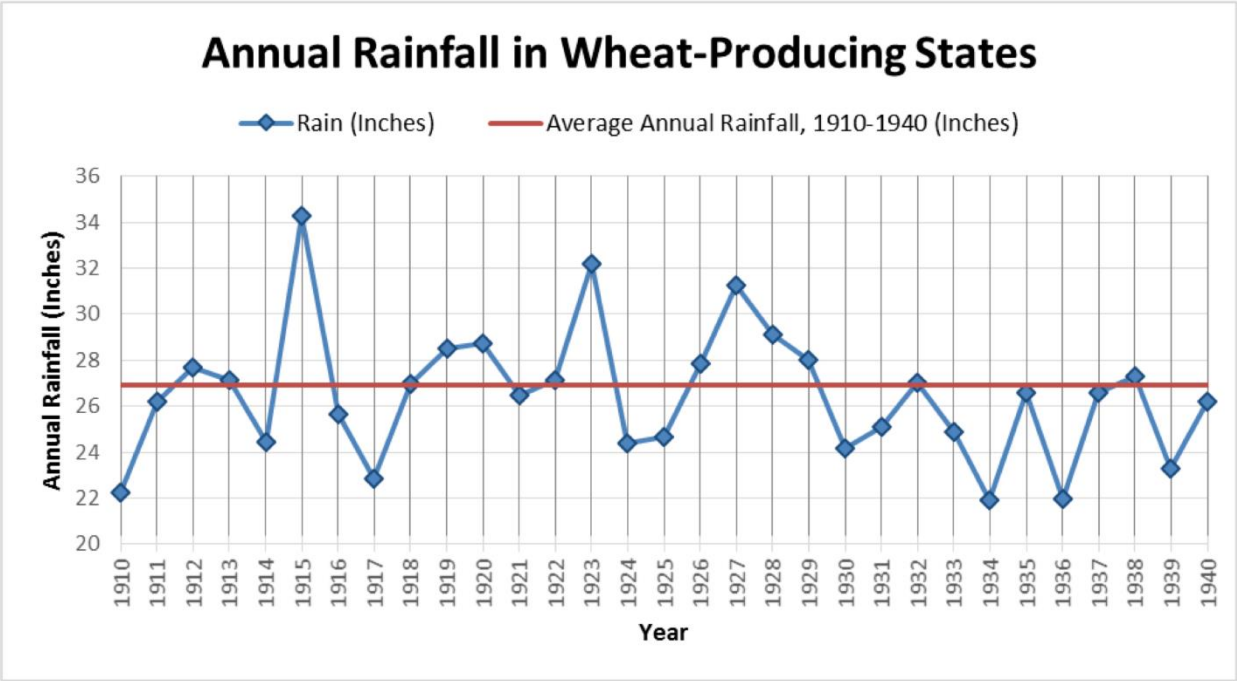
Annual Rainfall in Wheat-Producing States, 1910-1940

This graph shows the annual rainfall in the Great Plains wheat-producing areas (including the Texas Panhandle) from 1910-1940, and includes the average annual rainfall in the region during that period as reference.



Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Centers for Environmental Information. http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/cag/time-series/us/

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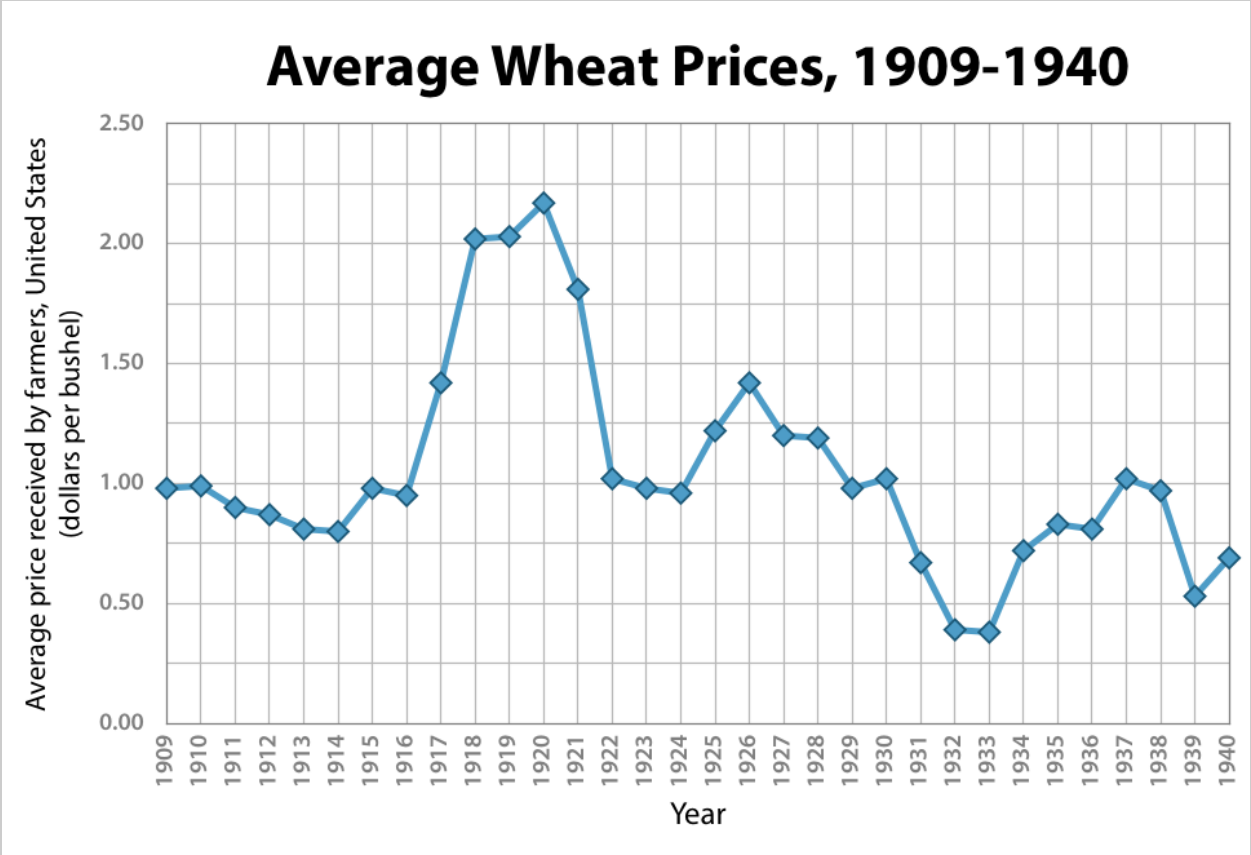
Average Wheat Prices, 1909-1940

This graph, based on data collected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, details the average annual price that farmers received for a bushel (60 pounds) of wheat from 1909 to 1940.



Source: United States Department of Agriculture, "Table 1–Wheat: Planted acreage, harvested acreage, production, yield, and farm price: All Years," The Wheat Year Book", 2016. http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/wheat-data.aspx#25377, accessed 4/14/2016.

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On the XIT Ranch

The XIT Ranch was a cattle ranch in Northern Texas that operated from 1885 to 1912. At its height, the ranch stretched over 3,000,000 acres across the Texas Panhandle, and was a major contributor to the booming Texas cattle industry. By 1912, however, growing debts forced XIT owners to sell their land, much of which was later converted into farmland. In this photo, taken in 1904, XIT ranchers use a hot iron to burn the XIT insignia into each cow's flesh with a hot iron (a practice known as branding) in an attempt to discourage theft.

Source: W.D. Harper, "Branding on the XIT," 1904, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C. Photo copyrighted by C.A. Kendrick, Denver. https://www.loc.gov/item/2006690182

Clothing Drive Article

Private charity drives—like this one for used clothing in Shamrock, Texas—were essential for Americans who were unable to provide for themselves and their families due to the effects of the Great Depression. High unemployment rates and crop failures made buying clothes financially unfeasible for many Americans, who had to rely on charitable events to get basic necessities.

B. and P.W. Club Starts Drive for Castoff Clothing; Citizens asked to donate old clothes to aid in relief work

Members of the local Business and Professional Women's club will sponsor an old clothes drive in connection with Cleanup and Paintup week, according to Mrs. George McFann, president, responding to a plea from the Shamrock relief office for cooperation in aiding persons on relief rolls.

Anyone who has articles of clothing to donate, is asked to call the relief office, or any member of the club and they will be called for.

Regardless of what condition the wearing apparel may be in, the ladies in charge of the sewing room will mend them. Shoes, and especially men's shoes, are needed, Mrs. McFann stated.

The drive will last through the week and all local residents are urged to cooperate with the club in making it a success.

Source: "B. and P.W. Club Starts Drive for Castoff Clothing," *The Shamrock Texan,* Thursday, June 13, 1935, Vol. 32, No. 32, pg. 1.

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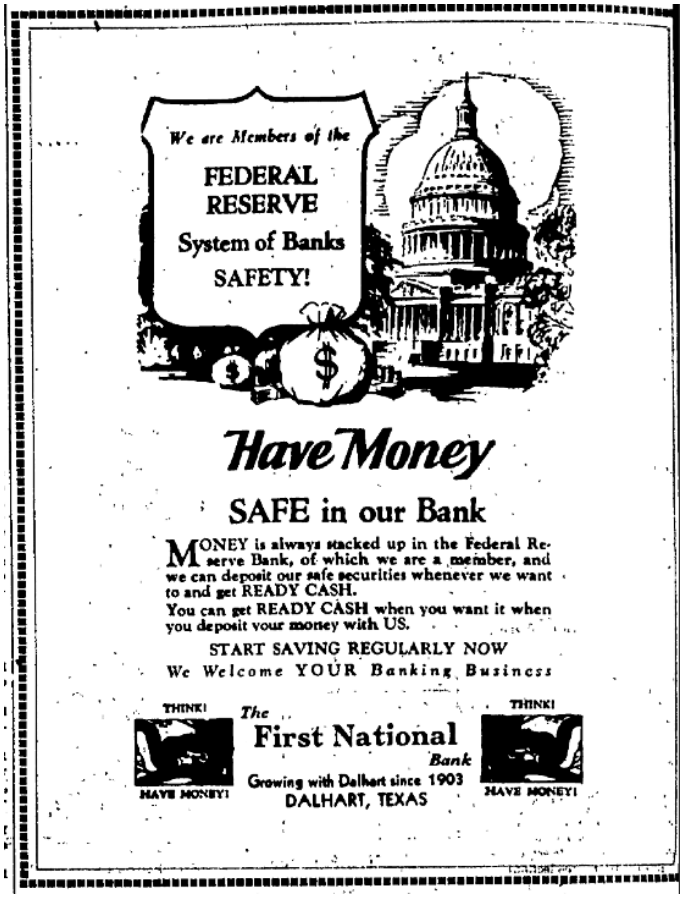
First National Bank Advertisement

After the Stock Market Crash in 1929, many Americans–anxious that they would lose all their money–rushed to their local banks and cashed out their savings. These "bank runs" were justified: in 1930 alone, more than 1,300 banks failed, losing depositors millions of dollars. This advertisement from the First National Bank in Dalhart, Texas, attempted to give readers confidence that their money was secure because the bank was a member of the Federal Reserve system of banks. One year later, President Roosevelt signed the 1933 Banking Act and formed the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, or FDIC, which insured the money held in banks.



Source: "Have Money Safe in our Bank" in *The Dalhart Texan*, March 15, 1932, pg. 2.

Article on Hoover's Veto of the Relief Bill

Throughout the Great Depression, Republican and Democratic politicians disagreed on how best to handle the nation's economic crisis. Democratic politicians, like Speaker of the House John Nance Garner and Senator Robert Wagner, argued that the federal government should take an active role and intervene in the Depression. The Wagner-Garner Relief Bill, which proposed spending over 2 billion dollars on unemployment relief, was an example of their position. Republican President Herbert Hoover, however, believed that the Depression would be short lived and the economy would right itself through private business and charity. The following newspaper article from 1932 outlines Hoover's reason for vetoing the unemployment bill.

Garner Relief Bill Measure Vetoed

WASHINGTON – President Hoover today sent to Congress a prompt and vigorous veto of the $2,122,000,000 Wagner-Garner unemployment relief bill.

The vetoed bill immediately was referred to the House Ways and Means Committee with the Democratic leadership making no attempt to override the veto.

The president's veto message was dispatched from the White House less than 10 minutes after the bill, passed by both houses in advance of this long threatened veto, had been signed by Garner and Vice-President Curtis.

Mr. Hoover said the Wagner-Garner bill "Violates every sound principle of public finance and government."

"Never before has so dangerous a suggestion been seriously made to our country," the president said.

Mr. Hoover urged enactment of a compromise relief bill which he said should be changed around the proposal he had made previously.

"With the utmost seriousness," Mr. Hoover said, "I urge the Congress to enact a relief measure but I cannot approve the measure before me, as it is with possibility of special privileges, so impractical of administration, so dangerous to public credit and damaging to our whole conception of governmental relations to the people as to bring far more distress than it will cure."

Source: "Garner Relief Bill Measure Vetoed," *Sweetwater Daily Reporter*, Sweetwater, Texas, July 11, 1932, pg. 1.

The Plow That Broke the Plains

The U.S. government's Resettlement Administration, a forerunner of the Farm Security Administration, produced The Plow That Broke the Plains*, a documentary film directed by Pare Lorentz. The film combines poetic narration with footage of drought conditions throughout the Great Plains region (some of which was filmed in Dalhart, Texas). Lorentz wanted the film to portray both the greatness of America's agricultural landscape and the dangers of abusing it. In the following seven-minute clip, the film transitions from the growth and abundance of crops following World War I to the barren wastelands of the Dust Bowl era.*

Transcript:

VII: BLUES
Then we reaped the golden harvest...
then we really plowed the plains...
we turned under millions of new acres for war wheat.
We had the man-power...
we invented new machinery...
the world was our market.
By 1933 the old grass lands had become the new
wheat lands...a hundred million acres...
two hundred million acres...
More wheat!

VIII: DROUGHT
A country without rivers...without streams...
with little rain...
Once again the rains held off and the
sun baked the earth.
This time no grass held moisture against the
winds and the sun...this time millions of acres
of plowed land lay open to the sun.

Source: Pare Lorentz, "The Plow That Broke the Plains," U.S. Resettlement Administration, 1936.
https://archive.org/details/plow_that_broke_the_plains
(14:15 - 21:03 min)

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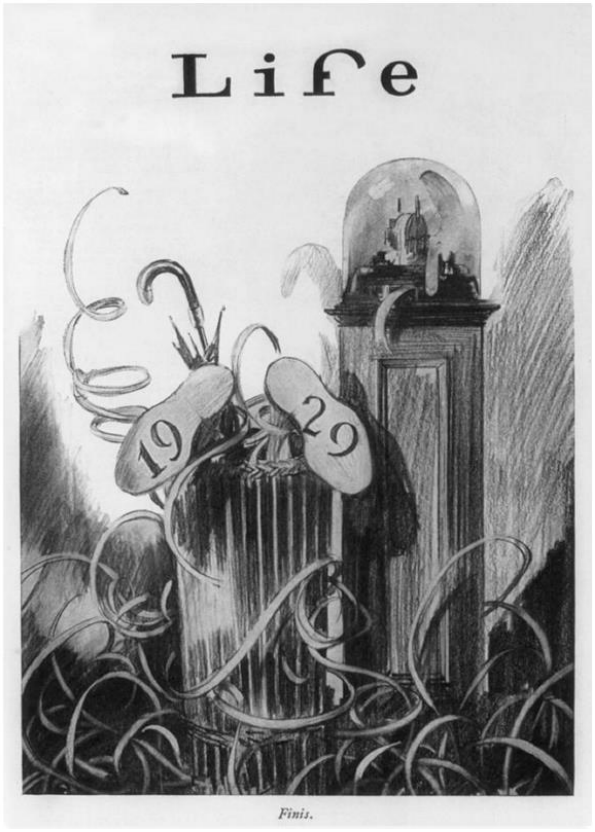
The Stock Market Crash

On October 24, 1929, stock market prices plummeted. In the ensuing panic, investors on Wall Street attempted to stop any further losses by selling a record 12.9 million stocks in one day. The market continued to fall, however, ushering in the largest financial and unemployment crisis in U.S. history: the Great Depression. This cover of Life *magazine depicts the stock market crash in 1929 (represented here by ticker tape (strings of papers printed with stock prices) and shoes labeled "1929" in a waste basket).*



Source: *Life Magazine*, "Finis" 1929 Dec. 27, cover illustration. Library of Congress, https://lccn.loc.gov/2011649515

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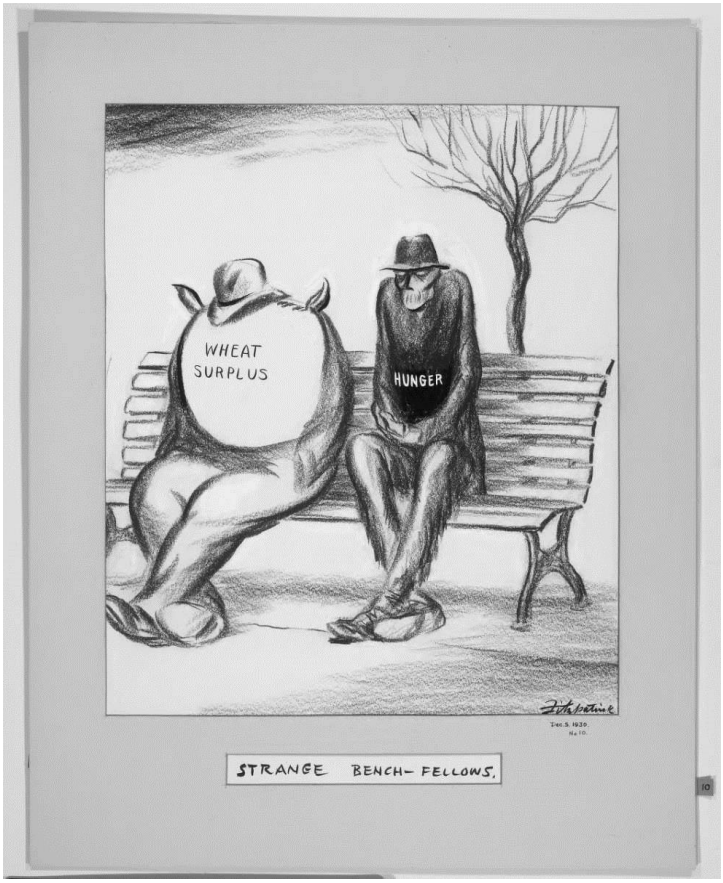
Wheat Surplus Political Cartoon

In the early years of the Great Depression, wheat farmers in the U.S. generated more wheat than was needed. A greater supply, however, led to lower demand for the crop, and the price of wheat dropped. Fearing an economic collapse in agriculture, the federal government withheld wheat shipments and encouraged farmers to grow less wheat. For those in urban centers who were unemployed and hungry, refusing shipments of food seemed unimaginable. This 1930 cartoon highlights the contrast between a surplus of wheat and an increase in hunger.



Source: Daniel Robert Fitzpatrick, "Strange Bench Fellows," *St. Louis Dispatch*, 1930. http://shsmo-tc1.missouri.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ec/id/11468/rec/35 Fitzpatrick, Daniel Robert, 1891-1969 The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Editorial Cartoon Collection.

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4-H Club Pamphlet

4-H is a national organization that began in 1914 with the purpose of promoting hands-on education for youth in rural areas. 4-H clubs teach children farming techniques, home economics, and encourage engagement in local communities. This text from the national 4-H organization's 1926 handbook details the organization's goals; also included is a page from the club's equipment catalogue.

Club Work – What It Is

Boys' and Girls' Club Work is a nation-wide movement which gives rural boys and girls an opportunity to develop themselves educationally, economically and socially.
It is a movement which demonstrates the better practices in agriculture and home economics.
It makes play out of work.
It promotes industry and thrift.
It applies business methods to farming.
It develops self-reliance, ambition and aggressiveness.
It fosters individual ownership a love of nature and the things in the open country: it makes farm life attractive.
Through contests it brings out the best effort and thought.
It stands for the four-fold development of the Head, Heart, Hands, and Health.
Its slogan is "Make the Best Better."
And above all it develops the highest type of manhood, womanhood and American citizenship.
Boys' and Girls' 4-H Club work is organized and administered by the Agricultural Colleges, the U.S. Department of Agriculture co-operating.

4-H EQUIPMENT

No. 21. COTTON FELT SKULL CAPS

Alternate green and white panels. Process emblem in one panel. Well sewed. Especially adapted for use by boys' demonstration teams, judging contests or for wear in club camps. These caps are quite durable. Can be worn many times. Are suitable for award for completion of records, or recognition for certain types of achievement.

Single caps, postpaid, 30c each
10 for $ 2.75
25 for 6.40
50 for 12.50
100 for 24.00

No. 22. APRONS

Best quality crepe paper aprons as illustrated. Especially attractive for club girls in parades; also nice for favors at picnics or banquets. Can be worn by girls in demonstrations.

Our special prices:
10c each
10 for $ .90
25 for 2.20
50 for 4.30

No. 23. SHIELDS

Official achievement shields printed in three colors on green felt. Just the thing for girls' headgear, sleeve or pocket of demonstration uniforms. Ready to sew on.

25c each
10 for $ 2.30
25 for 5.50
100 for 20.00

No. 20-A. ARMBANDS

Diamond shape, green emblem on white felt, size three inches by five inches; equipped with elastic. A good identification mark for club boys and girls in crowds, such as Farm Bureau picnics, camps or fairs. Effective in parades.

PRINTED EMBLEM
Price each $ .20
10 for 1.90
25 for 4.50
50 for 8.50
100 for 16.00

SEWED EMBLEM
Price each $ .25
10 for 2.40
25 for 5.75
50 for 11.00
100 for 20.50

16

Source: The National Committee, "4-H Handy Book: Songs, Ritual, Equipment," 1926, pgs. 2, 16.

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Bonus Army Memoir

In the following memoir, World War I veteran W.W. Waters recalls the high unemployment and low morale he witnessed on the streets of Portland, Oregon, during the first years of the Great Depression. Facing a similar situation himself, Waters was a founding member of the Bonus Expeditionary Force, a collective of veterans who marched from Oregon to Washington D.C. in the spring of 1932 demanding immediate payment of their war bonuses.

In my ceaseless beating about the city I found family after family in the same general condition or worse. I saw men half clad, in threadbare clothing, pacing the streets in soleless shoes. On their faces was the same look, part of hope, part of bewilderment, as they searched for a chance to earn a few dollars at honest work. I talked with hundreds of these men and found that, with few exceptions, they wanted not charity but work that would enable them to lives and to regain their self-respect…

These men did think and talk a great deal about the so-called Bonus. The name "Bonus" is unfortunate. It is not a gift, as the word implies. It is a payment of money to *compensate* those men who served in the Army for the difference in pay between that of service men and non-service men in 1918. The bill, asking payment in full of the adjusted compensation for wartime service, was introduced by Representative Patman of Texas and, during the early winter of 1931, was pending in Congress. The majority of veterans were hoping that it would pass.

These men had fallen far down into the valley of despair. Some push was necessary to start them out and up over the hill. Jobs would have provided the best sort of impetus but there were no jobs. The Bonus, a lump sum of money, could act in the same fashion. Debts could be met, doctors' bills paid, a fast fraying credit renewed, and one man could look another in the eye once more…

The point, continually forgotten, is that the Bonus in these men's minds became a substitute or a symbol for that long dreamt of new start, a job. These men had nothing to which to look forward except to the shiny shoulders of the man in front of them in the breadline. Whenever I asked these men which they would rather have, the Bonus or a job, the replay was nearly always the same: "A job, of course. But where's a job coming from? I've looked every day for over a year and haven't found one."

Source: W.W. Waters and William C. White, *B.E.F. The Whole Story of The Bonus Army* (New York: The John Day Company, 1933), pgs. 6-10. http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001874081

"Bonus Ouster Disgrace"

During the summer of 1932, thousands of World War I veterans descended on Washington D.C. to demand early payment of their wartime bonus payments and camped out in the city, awaiting Congressional action. On July 28, 1932, President Hoover used the army to force the remaining Bonus Marchers out of their main campground and set fire to their tents. Americans were horrified by this treatment of the poor and desperate veterans. Three months later, Hiram Johnson, a senator from California, addressed the event in a speech.

One of the blackest pages in our history was written with fire and sword after the adjournment of Congress. Some thousands of worn and tattered veterans assembled in Washington during the session to beg for work on the payment of their adjusted compensation certificates. I saw these men daily and talked often with many of them. I deny they were either vicious or criminals. Their errand was futile and their march to Washington probably should never have been undertaken. But they had the right to come to the nation's capital.

They were the men who but a decade ago were proclaimed the heroes and the saviors of the republic. Their plight was pitiable, and I never saw more moving sight than these tattered veterans proudly marching despite their condition behind the Stars and Stripes. They were orderly and guilty of neither violence or crime in Washington.

The President sent against these men, emaciated from hunger, scantily clad, unarmed, the troops of the United States army. Tanks, tear-bombs, all of the weapons of modern warfare were directed against those who had borne bravely the arms of the republic. The miserable shelters of the men were burned and in many instances they housed women and children, and the soldiers we had acclaimed so but fifteen years ago, who went with our cheers and our tears to fight our battles were ruthlessly driven from their camp, and at the sword's point herded into the shelterless darkness and the night.

Source**:** Senator Hiram Johnson. "Speech in Aragon Ballroom, Chicago, November 4," reprinted in *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, November 5, 1932.
http://www.ecommcode.com/hoover/hooveronline/hoover_and_the_depression/bonus_march/group_index.cfm?GroupID=19

A Child's View of the Drought

Ethel Oleta Wever Belezzouli was born in Oklahoma and moved with her family to California when she was a teenager. In this oral history recorded in 1981, Belezzouli describes the dust storms she and her family faced while still living in Oklahoma, the difficult growing seasons, and the resourcefulness of her local farming community.

Interviewer: It sounds like your life on the farm was kind of an idyllic life. But what happened when the drought came?

Ethel Oleta Wever Belezzouli: …We moved to another place. The house wasn't nearly so nice but it wasn't that bad. . . . I remember the first sandstorm that I had anything to do with. We were walking home. Of course, we walked a lot then. There were cars and we had a car, but people thought nothing of walking. Everybody walked. So we were walking home probably three or four miles and this huge, huge black cloud came. We thought it was going to be a thunderstorm or a rainstorm but it was only dust. And it just blotted out the sun. It was just like night. People had to use their car lights. The town lights went on. It was very, very bad but then there would be a while without any storms. Then we'd have more sandstorms and more sandstorms.

Afterwards sand piled up two feet high in front of your door. It went through your windows and everyplace. It just permeated everything. Those were bad.

Interviewer: Do you remember your father talking very much about how that affected the crops?

Belezzouli: Oh yes. The big question was, "Will it rain?" We noticed every little cloud. But it didn't rain. There was quite a long period there that it didn't rain. The farmers would sow their crops. I shouldn't say there was no rain because I remember my dad did grow some broomcorn and cotton. I remember those two crops. It was very exciting for the young girls in the community when the broomcorn johnnies came… They'd go from town to town and farmer to farmer [harvesting broomcorn]. All the women would go and help whoever was having them that day cook the dinner. The young girls would serve and get to meet all the handsome men. That was interesting for me too. I liked that.

Interviewer: But as the storms grew worse and the drought grew worse what happened to your financial situation?

Belezzuoli: I rather imagine it was pretty bad.

Source: "Interview with Ethel Oleta Wever Belezzouli," California State College, Bakersfield - *California Odyssey: The 1930s Migration to the South San Joaquin Valley*, pgs. 7-8
http://www.csub.edu/library/_files/DB_files/Belezzuoli124.pdf

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Farm Foreclosure "Evacuation Sale"

This image of an "evacuation sale" in 1933 depicts the impact of foreclosures on farmers' lives. As farmers became unable the sell their crops and earn income, they were forced into debt. Some were unable to pay their mortgages and were evicted from their property. Suddenly homeless, farmers had to sell as many of their belongings as they could to survive.

Source: **"**Farm foreclosure sale," 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, 7420 (269).
http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/collections/franklin/index.php?p=digitallibrary/digitalcontent&id=3494

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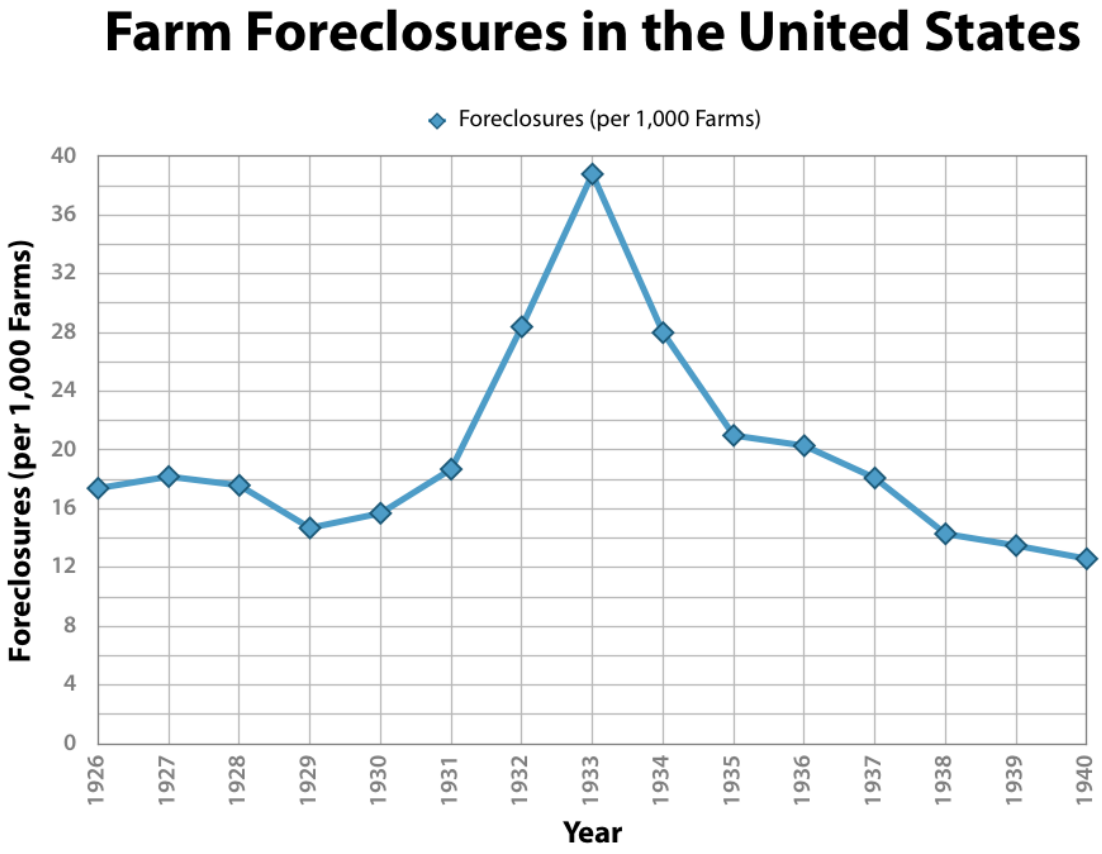
Farm Foreclosures in the United States

This graph depicts the number of farm foreclosures (banks reclaiming ownership of farms when farmers can not make mortgage payments) per 1,000 farms in the United States from 1926 to 1940. While the farm economy was not initially affected by the stock market crash of 1929, market prices for crops dropped significantly in the early 1930s. Farmers were then unable sell what they had grown for a reasonable price and could not pay their mortgages and other credit payments, leading to foreclosure.



Source data: Lee J. Alston, "Farm Foreclosures in the United States During the Interwar Period," *Journal of Economic History,* vol. 43, issue 4, December 1983, pg. 888.

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Father Cox on the Breadline

Father James Renshaw Cox was a Catholic priest from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, who arranged private charity donations through his church during the Depression. In this image from 1930, Cox helps to pass out loaves of bread to needy families. In 1932, Cox earned national recognition when he and thousands of protesters marched to Washington D.C. to demand jobs for the unemployed.

Source: "A view of bread being unloaded and passed down the line," ca. 1930, James R. Cox Papers, 1923-1950, University of Pittsburgh
http://images.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/i/image/image-idx?rgn1=hpicasc_ci;med=1;q1=AIS.1969.05;size=20;c=hpicasc;back=back1455894304;subview=detail;resnum=10;view=entry;lastview=thumbnail;cc=hpicasc;entryid=x695.0829.fc;viewid=0829FC TIF

Herbert Hoover Addresses the Bonus Bill

President Herbert Hoover gave this speech to the annual meeting of the American Legion on September 21, 1931. (The American Legion is a national organization for military veterans.) Veterans of World War I were eligible for a cash bonus for their service, due to be paid in 1945. The Legion supported a bill in Congress that would require the federal government to immediately pay veterans their bonuses, which would cost $3,400,000,000. Hoover opposed the bill, as he explains in this speech, because it would increase the federal government's budget deficit (meaning the government would be spending more money than it collected). When the bill to fund the bonuses came up for a vote in Congress, it did not pass.

The world is passing through a great depression fraught with grueling daily emergencies alike to men and to governments… Some individuals may have lost their nerve and faith, but the real American people are digging themselves out with industry and courage. We have the self-containment, the resources, the manhood, the intelligence, and by united action we will lead the world in recovery.

Today the National Government is faced with another large deficit in its budget. There is a decrease in the annual yield of income taxes… Simultaneously we are carrying a high and necessary extra burden of public works in aid to the unemployed, of aids to agriculture and of increased benefits and services to veterans.

Make no mistake. In these circumstances it is those who work in the fields, at the bench and desk who would be forced to carry an added burden for every added cent to our expenditures. We can carry our present expenditures without jeopardy to national stability. We can carry no more without grave risks.

I am not speaking alone of veterans' legislation which has been urged for action at this convention, but I am speaking equally of demands for every other project proposed in the country which would require increased Federal expenditure…

Source: Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover Vol. 2: The Cabinet and Presidency, 1920-1933* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), 288-289.

President Hoover Encourages Private Charity

President Herbert Hoover wrote the following letter to 10-year-old Barbara McIntyre of Columbus, Ohio after she wrote to him 1931 to report that she and her friends planned to collect old blankets, clothing, shoes, and food to send to him in Washington, for distribution to the poor.

The White House
Washington
November 19, 1931

My dear Barbara,

I have your very sweet letter of November 10th. It is a beautiful undertaking. I would suggest, however, that instead of sending the contributions which you collect to me, that you should distribute them to those in need in your own locality.

Yours faithfully,
Herbert Hoover

Source: Stanley Weintraub and Rodelle Weintraub, eds., *Dear Young Friend: The Letters of American Presidents to Children*, Mechanicsville, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000.
http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1373

"Of Course We Can Do It!" Advertisement

Few Americans expected the government to take drastic action when the Depression struck. Many turned instead to their employers, merchants, churches, landlords, and local banks, as well as to family networks, for assistance. This 1931 advertisement, placed by the President's Organization on Unemployment Relief, encourages local voluntary charity as a response to the Great Depression. As the Depression and unemployment deepened, however, it became clear that local relief was drastically inadequate and aggressive government action was needed.

NOVEMBER 21, 1931 THE LITERARY DIGEST 45

Of course WE CAN DO IT!

● We dug the Panama Canal, didn't we? And they said we couldn't do that.

● We put an army in France four months after we entered the World War, didn't we? And surprised the world.

● Now we've got a tough one to crack right here in our own back yard.

Men are out of work. Our men. Our neighbors. Our citizens. Honest, hard-working folk.

They want jobs. They're eager to work. But there aren't jobs enough to go 'round. Somebody's got to tide them over.

Who's going to do it? The people who dug that ditch. The people who went to France, or bought Liberty Bonds, or went without sugar—Mr. and Mrs. John K. American.

That means you—and *you*—and Y O U!—every one of us who is lucky enough to have a job.

We're going to share our luck with the folks out of work, aren't we? Remember—there's no National fund they can turn to for relief. It's up to us! And we've got to dig deeper than we did last winter.

But if we all dig deep enough we can keep a roof over every head, food in every pantry, fuel on every fire, and warm clothing on every needy man, woman and child in America.

That will beat Old Man Depression and lead the way to better days. Can we do it? Of course we can do it. Give . . . and give generously.

WHERE TO GIVE: There is no National Agency through which you may contribute. The way for you to give is through your *local* welfare and relief organizations, through your Community Chest or through your emergency unemployment committee if you have one.

THE PRESIDENT'S ORGANIZATION ON UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF

Walter S. Gifford Director
(WALTER S. GIFFORD)

COMMITTEE ON MOBILIZATION OF RELIEF RESOURCES

Owen D. Young Chairman
(OWEN D. YOUNG)

● The President's Organization on Unemployment Relief is non-political, and non-sectarian. Its purpose is to aid local welfare and relief agencies everywhere to provide for local needs. All facilities for the nation-wide program, including this advertisement, have been furnished to the Committee without cost.

Source: "Of Course We Can Do It!," *Literary Digest*, November 21, 1931. American Social History Project. http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6787

Primary Source Document Collection

MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

World War I Veterans March in Washington

In the summer of 1932, facing unemployment and poverty because of the Great Depression, veterans of the Great War (now known as World War I) began demanding that the bonuses be distributed immediately. Nearly 20,000 veterans marched to Washington and camped out in the Anacostia Flats section of the city; newspapers called them the "bonus army." This New York Times *article describes a June march by some of the veterans down Pennsylvania Avenue, the street in Washington on which the White House is located.*

An army of 7,000 ex-service men paraded up Pennsylvania Avenue tonight in motley uniforms but orderly ranks**.**

One hundred thousand spectators lined the sidewalks, an unusually large turnout for this city, and applauded the marchers repeatedly.

It was the first formal gesture of the "bonus expeditionary force" in its campaign to [persuade] Congress to pay immediately the entire $2,400,000,000 called for by their [veterans' bonuses].

Its purpose was to show Congress the determination of the men to stay here until they collect what they contend is a debt, and at the same time it showed the city that it was face to face with a social problem that grows as new thousands of veterans roll in afoot and in box cars…

First came the colors and pro-bonus banners of the massed units, and after them, in a place of honor, the veterans who had received medals for heroism. There were scores of these.

Then, in order came the six regiments. Most of the men showed the poverty that has caused them to come here. They were in every conceivable garb…Most of them were coatless, some wore frayed suits, but almost to a man their shirts were freshly washed, though unironed, and their faces fresh shaven.

There were even a few women and an uncomprehending baby or two, for a dozen wives had come here with their husband…

Source: "7,000 in Bonus Army Parade in Capital, Orderly But Grim," *New York Times*, June 8, 1932, 1.

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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

"Boys Hopping Freight"

During the Great Depression, an estimated 250,000 youths left home to search for work, to ease the burden on their families, to escape an abusive home life, or to find adventure. Opportunities for work were rare and never long-term, and most young transients hitchhiked or illegally rode freight trains, traveling from town to town. Empty and unlocked boxcars offered shelter from the weather but could also invite danger. In 1932, the Interstate Commerce Commission reported 425 deaths and 1,344 injuries of people getting on or off moving trains.

Source: Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information, "Boys Hopping Freight," c. 1935-1942, Library of Congress, American Memory Collection, http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8e03154
http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1080

Conclusions on Deportation Laws

In 1930, as it became apparent that the stock market crash of 1929 had set off a severe economic depression, some local and state officials believed that their limited relief funds should not be given to foreign-born residents. Mexicans, already the target of discrimination, were particularly vulnerable. Around the country, local officials discouraged Mexican immigrants from applying for relief, used law enforcement to intimidate Mexican communities, and even forcibly deported–or repatriated–thousands of Mexicans and Mexican-American citizens back to Mexico. This federal government report describes the "grave abuses and unnecessary hardships" involved in the way the U.S. enforced existing deportation laws.

A vigorous enforcement of the deportation laws is necessary both to carry out our immigration policy and to rid the country of undesirable residences unlawfully here. The execution of the laws involves most important rights of personal liberty; the processes of deportation reach over 100,000 persons a year, many of whom are aliens lawfully in the country or United States citizens. In the administration of the laws one agency of the United States Government acts as investigator, prosecutor, and judge, with despotic powers. Under the present system not only is the enforcement of the law handicapped but grave abuses and unnecessary hardships have resulted.

a. The apprehension and examination of supposed aliens are often characterized by methods unconstitutional, tyrannical, and oppressive.
b. There is strong reason to believe that in many cases persons are deported when further development of the facts or proper construction of the law would have shown their right to remain.
c. Many persons are permanently separated from their American families with results that violate the plainest dictates of humanity.
d. The enforcement of the deportation laws is handicapped by the overcentralization of the administrative machinery and by burdening that machinery with the performance of conflicting duties.

Source: National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, *Report on the Enforcement of the Deportation Laws of the United States* (Government Printing Office, Washington: 1931), 177. http://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:4673882$181i

"I'm Going to Fight Like Hell": Anna Taffler and the Unemployed Councils of the 1930s

The Communist-led Unemployed Councils mobilized jobless men and women in hundreds of local communities to demand jobs and better treatment from relief authorities. In these excerpts from a recorded interview, Anna Taffler, a Communist activist and a Russian Jewish immigrant, described how her own experience of facing eviction pushed her into organizing the unemployed. She also talked about the focus of local councils on issues like fighting for more relief and stopping evictions.

"The courts are no good, the system is no good, everything is no good!" And I says, "I'm going to fight like hell!" And I started in…

I still had no home, so I started looking for help, asking around. And I had some friends, and they told me that…they're organizing unemployment councils…So I told myself, "You need to be in the organization of the unemployed councils."

Their policy was to give as little relief as possible…It was a constant struggle. So we would come to the relief bureau at that time, and we would stay in the auditorium and we would ask people, you know, "We are from the unemployment council. We are from the Workers Alliance. What are your needs?" and so on and so forth. And people were only too glad to get help, you know. I'd go around and sign them up for membership. But if they didn't have the quarter, it was all right, too, you know. But, we would represent them. Some people were denied rent, and they were facing evictions. Some people were cut off of food. And you know how we did it? To open-air meetings, putting up platform right in the front of the relief bureau getting up and letting the people in the whole neighborhood know what's going on."

Source: Interview done by Oral History of the American Left, Tamiment Library, New York University, for the public radio program *Grandma Was an Activist*, producers Charlie Potter and Beth Friend,
http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/31

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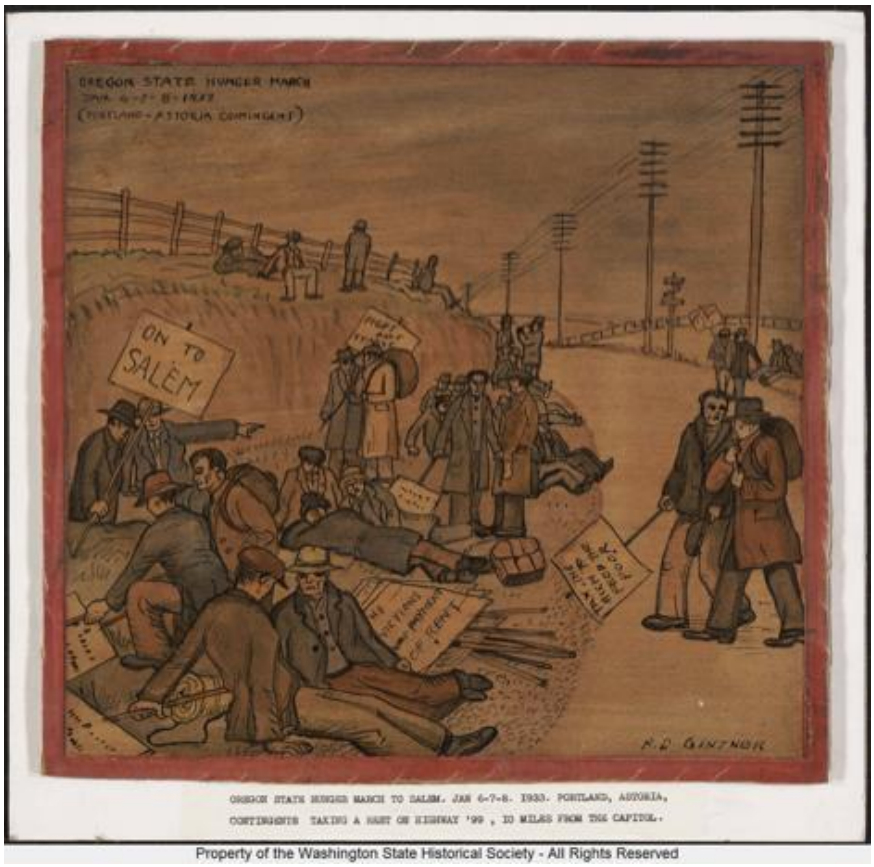
"Hunger March to Salem"

This painting by Ronald Debs Ginter depicts a hunger march to Salem, state capitol of Oregon, in January, 1933. Hunger marches were common protest events in which protesters demanded greater government aide to combat the unemployment, homelessness, and hunger caused by the Great Depression. In major cities throughout the United States, communist and other leftist organizations like the Unemployed Citizens' League and the United Front Unemployed organized hunger marches to publicize the plight of the unemployed and to promote their organizations' demands for government action.



Source: Ronald Debs Ginther, "Oregon State Hunger March to Salem," 1933. Washington State Historical Society.
http://digitum.washingtonhistory.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/art/id/82/rec/2

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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

"Family Who Traveled by Freight Train"

Young adults who were single men and women were not the only people who rode freight trains looking for work during the Great Depression. Whole families left home and rode the rails together in search of a better life. In this photo by Dorothea Lange, a father, mother, and two young boys are resting on the side of the railroad tracks. Note how the mother covers her face in the photo, possibly embarrassed by her family's situation.

Source: Dorothea Lange "Family who traveled by freight train. Washington, Toppenish, Yakima Valley," 1939, U.S. Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black & White Photographs, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000003842/PP/

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Oklahoma Tenant Farmers' Union

Founded in Arkansas in 1934, the interracial Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU) had two goals: to protect sharecroppers and tenant farmers from eviction by planters and to ensure that they received their share of the money due from Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) payments to landowners. By 1935, the Oklahoma Tenant Farmers' Union had seventy-five hundred members in numerous Oklahoma communities. It argued for decent living wages for field workers, an extension of a wage-and hour law to include agricultural labor, lower interest rates on loans for farmers, federal protection of migratory workers' civil liberties, and stable market prices. This photograph, taken in 1939, reflects the interracial membership of the Oklahoma Tenant Farmers Union, unusual for its time and place.

Source: Russell Lee, "Meeting of some members of the Oklahoma tenant farmers' union. Muskogee, Oklahoma," photograph; from Library of Congress,Prints & Photographs Division Washington, D.C., http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b22435

"Experience is the Best Teacher": Phoebe Eaton Dehart on Riding the Rails

Young women did not take to the road as often as young men, but contemporary reformers estimated that girls made up about ten percent of the 250,000 youth on the road during the Depression. Peggy Eaton Dehart grew up on a homestead in Wyoming and saw drought and grasshopper infestations reduce her family's earnings. But Peggy's decision to hit the road was not mainly economic; conflict with her father provoked her into leaving home with a friend when she was fifteen. Dehart was interviewed in April 1994.

My friend Irene Willis was boarding with my brother and his wife. Irene's parents had moved to Issaquah, Washington. She wanted to see them but had no money to travel and planned to hitchhike. She didn't want to go alone and asked me to come along.

I'd worked for two and a half weeks and collected $2.50. Irene said we could earn money picking fruit in Washington. I wrote my mother a letter telling her not to worry. "Experience is the best teacher," I told Mom. . . .

We hitchhiked to Wheatland and across the Laramie Mountains to Bosler Junction . . . That afternoon we caught a number of rides that took us three hundred miles across the state to Cokeville, near the Idaho border. . . .

"Uncle Slim" and "Daddy Joe" introduced themselves: Slim Jack Fuller was thirty-seven and Joe Daniels was sixty. They came from Casper, Wyoming, and were on their way to the harvest in Washington.

When a train stopped for water, Slim and Daddy Joe found an open boxcar and helped us climb aboard. I sat swinging my legs out of the boxcar door as the train started to move. Slim slapped my shins. "Keep your feet down or you'll be jerked off into eternity," he said, warning that I could be hit by a switch.

We rode that train all day and night and most of the next day. It was a thrill seeing the wonderful scenery as we went along. At night Slim and Daddy Joe showed us how to roll up in the paper that lined the boxcar walls and stay warm.

Late the next afternoon we arrived at Nampa, Idaho. We had to change trains to go northwest. Irene and I waited in the jungle, while our friends went uptown to beg for food. When we'd eaten we went to join other hoboes sitting on a grassy amphitheater opposite the one empty boxcar that was going to Le Grande, Oregon. We were the only women among the group of fifty men.

Primary Source Document Collection

MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

By August 3, Irene and I had made it back to Nampo, Idaho, where we were arrested for vagrancy. The police fingerprinted us and locked us in a cell infested with bedbugs. In the morning we appeared in front of a judge, who fined us each ten dollars. We didn't have that kind of money. Watching the judge write something on a sheet of paper, we thought we would have to sit it out in jail at a dollar a day. Instead the judge gave us a voucher for a meal.

"When you've had your breakfast get out of town," he said. . . .

On Monday, August 15, I got a ride across the Laramie Mountains and arrived home in time for supper. I was lovingly greeted and was never scolded.

I'd been gone for five weeks and had traveled over twenty-four hundred miles. I still had fifty cents in my pocket. I'd written three letters and eleven postcards to let my family know where I was. I didn't consider myself a runaway.

Source: Errol Lincoln Uys, *Riding the Rails: Teenagers on the Move During the Great Depression*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), pg. 91-96.

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Seattle Hooverville

The Depression left millions of Americans unemployed. Some Americans and their families, unable to afford rents or mortgages on their homes, were forced to live on the streets. Massive shantytowns called "Hoovervilles"–named for President Hoover, whom many Americans blamed for the Depression–sprang up as temporary housing for the newly homeless. Seattle's largest Hooverville (seen in this photograph from 1933) stretched for over 9 acres and consisted of hundreds of shacks without electricity or running water.

Source: "Homeless shantytown known as Hooverville," ca. 1933, Seattle Photograph Collection, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collection Division.
http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/seattle/id/1167/rec/14

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"Billions of Govt. Spending"

In 1933, the first year of the New Deal, government spending reached 62.1 billion dollars. This amount of spending created a deficit (the difference between how much the government earned and how much it spent) of 35.2 billion dollars and left the U.S. with a national debt of over 22 billion dollars. Government spending continued to rise throughout Roosevelt's first term as President. Many Americans saw the government spending, needed to fund New Deal recovery programs, as financially wasteful and dangerous.

Source: Herbert Johnson, "Nonsense! If it gets too deep, you can easily pull me out!" *Saturday Evening Post*, Sept. 28, 1935. Copyright 1935 Curtis Publishing Company. Courtesy Mrs. Katherine Johnson Evans and Mrs. Herberta J. Muth.
*Rights may be restricted by Curtis Publishing Company

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Black Sunday Dust Storm

Years of drought in the Great Plains did more than drastically reduce farmers' crop yields. The dry conditions also created brittle surface soil that, when combined with heavy wind conditions, generated massive dust clouds. On April 14, 1935, one of the largest recorded dust storm phenomena in history crippled regions from the Texas Panhandle in the South to Canadian border in the North. Newspapers called the event, which displaced over 300 million tons of topsoil in one day, "Black Sunday." The following two pictures show how Black Sunday affected the town of Garden City, Kansas. The first image of downtown Garden City was taken fifteen minutes before the storm, and the second image was taken from the same spot as the storm hit.

Source: "Garden City, Kansas approximately 15 minutes later after dust storm blotted out the sun. Street lights are on allowing orientation of picture." Photo # 1 and 2 of sequence. In: "Effect of Dust Storms on Health," U. S. Public Health Service, Reprint No,. 1707 from *The Public Health Reports, Vol. 50, no. 40, October 4, 1935*. http://www.srh.noaa.gov/oun/?n=events-19350414-maps

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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

A Citizen Reports on How the New Deal Has Impacted His Life

This letter was written to President Roosevelt after his Fireside Chat radio broadcast of June 28, 1934, in which he explained the "Three R's" of the New Deal: relief, recovery, and reform. While economic data showed that the nation was beginning to recover from the worst of the Depression, Roosevelt also asked his listeners to answer four questions to determine if they personally were experiencing recovery. H.O.L.C. stands for the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, a New Deal program that allowed homeowners to refinance their mortgages to prevent foreclosure.

July 3, 1934
My dear Mr. President:—

Thank you many times for your cheerful message over the Radio. My family and I answered each of your questions as they were asked, in the affirmative, some in the negative. "Are you better off than last year" Yes, decidedly. "Are your debts less burdensome" Yes, Yes, thanks to your H.O.L.C. —Heretofore only the wealthy could hope to receive favors from our Government, but now even the "forgotten man" is remembered. "Is your bank account more secure?" Absolutely! "Is your faith in your future more firmly grounded?" Yes.

And now the negatives. "Have you lost any rights of freedom of action or choice?" None whatsoever, but I have gained some greater freedom under the New Deal—But let the Government continue to appoint and manage The [New] Dealers, and not listen to the clamoring of the Old Crowd...

John Pauer
Sacramento, Calif.

Source: Lawrence W. Levine and Cornelia R. Levine, eds., *The People and the President: America's Conversation with FDR* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 103.

Aftermath of Dust Storms

While the April 14, 1935, Black Sunday storm was the largest dust storm of the Great Depression, it was certainly not the first or only one to strike the Great Plains. In 1932, there were 14 reported dust storms in the region. By 1933, the number climbed to 38. Dust and dirt became a constant problem that affected many aspects of everyday life in the Dust Bowl. The following oral histories describe the consequences and cleanup process that took place at home after a storm.

Margie Daniels, Hooker, Oklahoma: The next morning you'd still have that dust settling in the air, but there would be the sunshine and all again but then everything would just be covered in dirt. Everything was full of dust. If you were cooking a meal, you'd end up with dust in your food and you would feel it in your teeth. You'd start to eat and when you would drink water or something, you would grit down and you always felt like you had grit between your teeth. You know it felt terrible.

Clella Schmidt, Spearman, Texas: The next day when Mother and my grandmother started cleaning out the house, they were taking the dirt out in buckets full. They were scooping it up onto, ah, ah, wheat scoops, which are pretty good-sized scoops, and carrying it out into the yard.

Imogene Glover, Guymon, Oklahoma: The dust was just like face powder. It was so heavy and thick. It wasn't like sand. It was just real heavy, like face powder. Only it was real dark, almost black.

Source: WGBH Educational Foundation, "American Experience: Surviving the Dust Bowl" Transcript, 1998. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/dustbowl/

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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

Eleanor Roosevelt and the New Deal

This photograph shows Eleanor Roosevelt touring a Works Progress Administration construction site in Des Moines, Iowa. The WPA was a New Deal program that created jobs for millions of unemployed Americans by organizing public works projects throughout the country. From 1935-1943, WPA workers built 40,000 new buildings, 5,900 schools, 1,686 parks, 1,000 libraries, and thousands of roads, bridges, tunnels, and other improvements to infrastructure. Roosevelt used her national influence as first lady to champion programs like the WPA, as well as other progressive social issues such as women's rights, anti-lynching campaigns, and improved working conditions for laborers. She continued her advocacy work for decades after the Great Depression, becoming a delegate to the United Nations and serving as the first U.S. Representative to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Source: "Eleanor Roosevelt at Works Progress Administration site in Des Moines, Iowa," Photographer Unknown, 6/8/1936 National Archives, Collection: Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Public Domain Photographs, 1882 - 1962 https://research.archives.gov/id/195991

Farmers' Lives in the Great Depression

This June 17, 1933 article in the Dalhart Texan *newspaper describes a meeting between community members and representatives of the Roosevelt administration who were seeking information about the impact of the Depression on communities in and around the Oklahoma Panhandle. Years of drought and increasing numbers of dust storms made it nearly impossible for farmers to grow crops or raise livestock, and the speakers begged for immediate and direct federal aid to combat these conditions and save farmers' lives.*

The simple, honest sons of the soil told a story of disaster and desolation to the four-state relief meeting at Gumon Friday that beggared description and staggers the mind.

President G. R. Gear, of the Guymon Chamber of Commerce, a banker, presided at the meeting called by the Chamber of Commerce and Red Cross officials of Guymon and Texas county. Three hundred delegates from approximately 30 counties attended.

Conditions Unbelievable

Not a blade of wheat in Cimarron county, Okla.; cattle dying there on the range; a few bushels of wheat in the Perryton areas against an average yield of four to six million bushels; with all stored surplus not more than fifty percent of the seeding needs will be met—ninety percent of the poultry dead in one Panhandle county because of sand storms; sixty cattle dying Friday afternoon, between Guymon and Liberol from some disease induced by dust—humans suffering from dust fever—milk cows going dry, turned into the highways to starve, hogs in such pitiable shape the buyers will not have them; cattle being moved from Dallam and other counties to grass; no wheat in Hartley county; row crops a remote possibility; cattle facing starvation; Potter, Seward and other Panhandle counties with one-third of their population on charity or relief work; ninety percent of farmers in most counties have had to drop loans, the continued drought forcing many of them to use the money for food, clothes, medicine, shelter.

These are only the dregs in the cauldron of the Panhandle's devastation. Civic leaders and farmers were asked to sketch conditions and they spent hours in rapid-fire talk.

Elmer Scott, Dallas, personal representative of Harry L. Hopkins, Washington, D.C., in charge of the administration of federal emergency relief, got these answers in questions asked

Panhandle farmers, relating to general conditions: No wheat crop, no row crop possible, no grass, no chance of any money being produced in the Panhandle before the wheat crop of mid-summer 1934, imperative need of millions of dollars now to save livestock so that human life can be sustained and the productive agencies of the Panhandle snatched from obliteration. Estimates are from 45 to 60 counties and 60,000 families must have help at once. At $250 per family to last the humans and livestock a year, the total is 15 million dollars...

Leaders Speak

This condition is beyond crop loans; beyond R. F. C. work these people must have direct help now." said C. R. (Jake) Stahl, of Borger.

> President Fanning: "This is not charity. These people only ask a chance to earn. they have built this country. Our government in helping them is not giving, but investing in a section that is a big portion of the nation's bread basket. We think it humanitarian when our government sends money to earthquake-torn Hawaii; to feed the destitute Belgians; to save the Armenians—are we to stand idly by and see our fellow citizens starve to death?
> Mr. Scott: "The big issue now is to save human lives."
> Dr. D. S. Lee, Guymon: "A doctor knows conditions as well as the farmers—better than any other town or city resident. These farm families are starving to death. I know a family living on bread and milk, with the one cow going."

Source: "Disaster Threatens Farmers; Prevailing Destitution Is Beyond Description; Farmers Facing Bitter Struggle, Tell Story of Hardships Caused by Drought, as Citizens Urge Relief Measures" in *The Dalhart Texan*, June 17, 1933, p. 1, 12.

Fearing Socialism and Communism in the New Deal

The New Deal had many critics. Some feared that the dramatic increase in government intervention in the economy would lead to communism, or that Roosevelt's power would lead to fascism. Since the 19th century, some Americans feared that socialism or communism would upset the nation's capitalist system and threaten American liberty. These fears had been especially strong since the Red Scare following World War I. The rise of dictators such as Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, and Tojo in the 1920s and 1930s added new worries about the threat of fascism. (This letter was reproduced with all of the author's original spelling, syntax, and grammar.)

Hornell, New York March 7, 1934

My Dear Senator:

It seems very apparent to me that the Administration at Washington is accelerating its pace towards socialism and communism… Everyone is sympathetic to the cause of creating more jobs and better wages for labor; but, a program continually promoting labor troubles, higher wages, shorter hours, and less profits for business, would seem to me to be leading us fast to a condition where the Government must more and more expand its relief activities, and will lead in the end to disaster to all classes. I believe that every citizen is entitled to know the policy of the Government, and I am so confused that I wish you would write me and advise me whether it is the policy of this Administration, of which you are a very important part, to further discourage business enterprise, and eventually set up a program which eliminates private industry and effort, and replaces it with Government control of industry and labor,—call it what you will: socialism, fascism, or communism, or by any other name. I am not addicted to annoying public office holders with correspondence, but if there are any private rights left in this country, then I would appreciate an early reply to this letter, so that I may take such action as is still possible, to protect myself and family. With kindest personal regards,

Yours truly, W.L.C. [male]

WLC:JFE
U.S. Senator Robert F. Wagner Senate Building
Washington, D.C

Source: McElvaine, Robert S., ed., *Down & Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 150.

The NAACP Challenges Social Security

President Roosevelt sent his Social Security bill, named the "Economic Security Act," to Congress in January 1935. Congress held committee hearings on the bill. Here, a representative of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a group dedicated to advancing the rights of African Americans, testifies before Congress about how the bill excludes African Americans.

Mr. Houston: ….The point that I am making is that in order to qualify for the old-age annuity there is a provision that taxes must be paid on behalf of this person prior to the day when he reaches 60 years. Now, for the benefit of Negroes, I want to inquire who would be benefited or excluded by that provision? First, and very serious, Negro share croppers and cash tenants would be excluded. I take it that I do not need to argue to this committee the fact that of the Negro population and of the population of the country generally, your Negro share cropper and your Negro cash farm tenant are just about at the bottom of the economic scale. He is not employed. There is no relation necessarily of master and servant by which he gets wages on which a tax could be levied. Therefore this population is excluded from the entire benefits of the old-age annuity, and that represents approximately, according to the 1930 census, 490,000 Negroes. Next: Domestic servants are ... excluded from the act ... because the system of employing domestic servants is so loose.... In addition to that, from the standpoint of present persons unemployed ... this old-age annuity does not provide for these ... I do not need to argue to the committee that Negroes have suffered from unemployment more than any other class of the community.

Source: "The Statement of Charles H. Houston, representing the NAACP, to the House Ways and Means Committee on the Economic Security bill," February 1, 1935. Washington, D.C. Excerpt from *Historical Thinking Matters*, http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/socialsecurity/0/inquiry/main/resources/34/

President Roosevelt Outlines the New Deal

In his first 100 days as President, Franklin Roosevelt pushed 15 major bills through Congress aimed at bringing America out of the Great Depression. His administration created economic reform programs such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Together, these and other relief programs were called The New Deal. In the following transcript from a nationally broadcasted radio address–one of many "fireside chats" he would give during his presidency–Roosevelt outlines The New Deal to the American people.

The legislation which has been passed or is in the process of enactment can properly be considered as part of a well-grounded plan.

First, we are giving opportunity of employment to one-quarter of a million of the unemployed, especially the young men who have dependents, to go into the forestry and flood-prevention work. This is a big task because it means feeding, clothing and caring for nearly twice as many men as we have in the regular army itself. In creating this civilian conservation corps we are killing two birds with one stone. We are clearly enhancing the value of our natural resources, and we are relieving an appreciable amount of actual distress. This great group of men has entered upon its work on a purely voluntary basis; no military training is involved and we are conserving not only our natural resources, but our human resources. One of the great values to this work is the fact that it is direct and requires the intervention of very little machinery...

Next, the Congress is about to pass legislation that will greatly ease the mortgage distress among the farmers and the home owners of the Nation, by providing for the easing of the burden of debt now bearing so heavily upon millions of our people.

Our next step in seeking immediate relief is a grant of half a billion dollars to help the States, counties and municipalities in their duty to care for those who need direct and immediate relief.

The Congress also passed legislation authorizing the sale of beer in such States as desired it. This has already resulted in considerable reemployment and incidentally has provided much needed tax revenue.

We are planning to ask the Congress for legislation to enable the Government to undertake public works, thus stimulating directly and indirectly the employment of many others in well-considered projects.

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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

Further legislation has been taken up which goes much more fundamentally into our economic problems. The Farm Relief Bill seeks by the use of several methods, alone or together, to bring about an increased return to farmers for their major farm products, seeking at the same time to prevent in the days to come disastrous overproduction which so often in the past has kept farm commodity prices far below a reasonable return. This measure provides wide powers for emergencies. The extent of its use will depend entirely upon what the future has in store.

Well-considered and conservative measures will likewise be proposed which will attempt to give to the industrial workers of the country a more fair wage return, prevent cut-throat competition and unduly long hours for labor, and at the same time encourage each industry to prevent overproduction...

Source: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Outlining the New Deal Program," Sunday, May 7, 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum.
http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/050733.html

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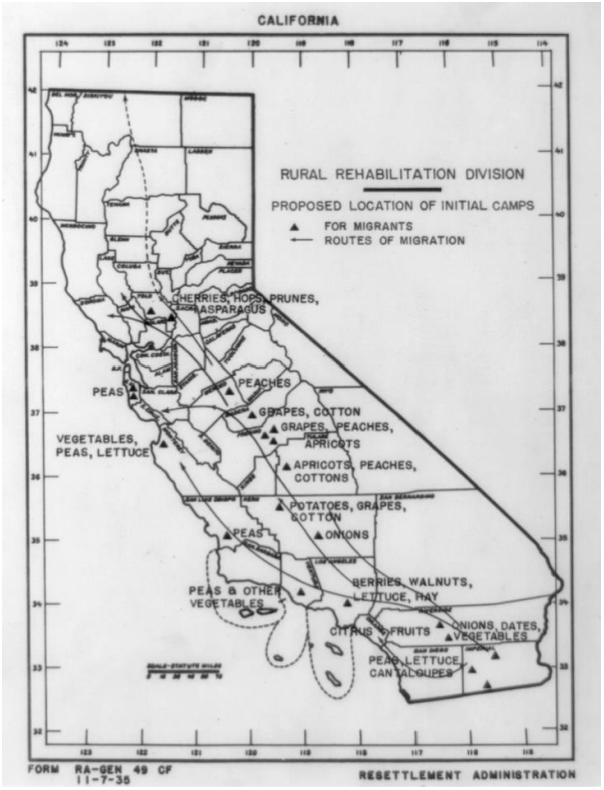
Proposed California Migrant Camps

This 1935 map of proposed camps for California migrant workers was part of an application by the California Rural Rehabilitation Division for $100,000 of state emergency relief aid. The map details both the crops grown at each proposed camp, as well as the major worker migration routes in the state. In response to the growing influx of laborers migrating west from the Dust Bowl, the federal government– through the Resettlement Administration and later the Farm Security Administration– distributed millions of dollars for projects to improve rural living and working conditions. By the time the camp programs ended in 1942, the FSA had built 95 camps throughout the country that housed over 75,000 workers and their families.



Source: Rural Rehabilitation Division, "Map of California showing areas where different crops are grown, proposed location of initial camps for migrants, and routes of migration," 1935, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002723443/

Camps and the Community

In 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt established the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to put young men aged 18-25 to work planting trees and helping farmers put soil conservation methods into effect. The federal government built more than 4,500 camps to house CCC members during their time in the program. Men in the CCC were paid $30 per month, with $25 sent home to their families. While people who lived near the camps appreciated the money that CCC members spent in their communities, this large influx of young male strangers was sometimes a source of tension. This letter to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt describes interactions between locals and CCC members in New Jersey.

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt,

I know the President is much too busy with greater problems. So, I as one mother to another beg of you to take this matter up with him if he has a spare moment.

About four and one half miles from Sussex, N.J., and very near our little farm is a camp of re-forest workers, young men from 18 to 25, and sorry to say the roughest kind. Up until three weeks ago our daughters were free to go to and from the village unmolested. These fellows have been to our door and neighbors trying to sell over-alls, bits of jewelry or work in the garden for a little money.

Last Friday our High School at Sussex gave a dance for the graduation class. Four of these chaps in over-alls and work shirts walked in and demanded admittance since it was public. It ended in a fight and the town policeman had to be called.

Saturday night our little movie house, only open Friday and Saturday for our children who can only see pictures seldom. Again a crowd of them got in the house and because it was an old picture, they hissed and made all sorts of remarks about it. They were asked to leave and the language from them was terrible.

Now I am sure you will understand what we are suffering. Our community has never been so upset. Any hour of the night, Saturday and Sunday groups are on the road from the camp to Sussex and it isn't safe for women or girls to be driving alone. Last week one of my neighbors' daughters was driving alone and two of four fellows asked for a ride and she refused, of course,

so they stood in her way where she couldn't turn out without going in the gutter or hitting them.

Now please, Mrs. R., won't you intercede for we Mothers here. And we shall be more than grateful.

Mrs. Chambers

Source: Chambers to Roosevelt, June 11, 1933, Box 956, Correspondence of Investigators, Division of Investigation, Record Group 35, U.S. National Archives (Washington, D.C.).

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The CCC and Public Parks

By 1935, the Roosevelt Administration had sent over 150,000 members of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to conserve, improve, and expand public park sites. CCC workers cleared walking trails and campsites, built administrative buildings, and planted millions of trees at parks around the country. This image shows CCC members making a camping table and benches (as their supervisor watches close by) in the Mount Baker National Forest in Washington State. The table and benches are designed in the "National Park Service Rustic" architectural style, a style that used wood and stone materials to build structures that blended into a park's natural environment.

Source: "C.C.C. boys constructing campground table and benches at Baker Lake Mt, Baker National Forest. Photo by Fromme." Department of Agriculture, 1936. National Archives: Records of the Forest Service, 1870-2008, Historic Photo Series. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/299010

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The CCC and Soil Conservation

Prior to the Great Depression, most farmers overplanted the same crops and failed to protect the land's delicate topsoil. Such farming practices left the soil less productive for growing and made the impact of the drought much worse. To combat this problem, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) worked with the Soil Conservation Service (a federal program responsible for reducing water and wind erosion in rural agricultural areas) to improve farming practices and revitalize damaged crop fields. In this photograph, CCC workers use tractors to dig division lines between crop fields. These tracks guided runoff water away from farmlands in order to prevent the formation of gullies (deep ditches caused by sudden water erosion).

Source: John Vachon, "CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) working with Soil Conservation Service making diversion terrace to prevent gullying, Vernon County, Wisconsin," September, 1939. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. LC-USF33-T01-001569. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1997004942/PP/

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Housing for Mexican Field Workers

Migrant farm workers, many of them Mexican or Mexican-American, travelled from job to job and received very low pay. As a result, they often had to live in whatever poor, unsanitary housing the growers provided. While working for the Farm Security Administration, Dorothea Lange photographed these conditions and exposed the problem to a national audience.

Source: Dorothea Lange, "Ditch bank housing for Mexican field workers. Imperial Valley, California." March, 1937. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. https://www.loc.gov/item/fsa2000000943/PP/

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Jim Crow at Camp Dix

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) provided many African American enrollees with valuable training and educational opportunities. While the legislation that established the CCC required that the corps accept young men regardless of race, the program was administered at the state level, resulting in instances of segregation. African-American corpsmen confronted racial prejudice and hostility both within the CCC camps and from nearby white communities. Luther C. Wandall, an African American from New York City, wrote the following account of his experiences in a segregated Civilian Conservation Corps camp for Crisis, *the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.*

During the two years of its previous existence I had heard many conflicting reports concerning the Civilian Conservation Corps, President Roosevelt's pet project. One boy told me that he almost froze to death one night out in Washington. Some said that the colored got all the leftovers. Others said that everything was all right. But my brother, who is a World War veteran, advised me emphatically: "I wouldn't be in anything connected with the Army." . . .

We reached Camp Dix about 7:30 that evening. As we rolled up in front of headquarters an officer came out to the bus and told us: "You will double-time as you leave this bus, remove your hat when you hit the door, and when you are asked questions, answer 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir.'"

And here it was that Mr. James Crow first definitely put in his appearance. When my record was taken at Pier I, a "C" was placed on it. When the busloads were made up at Whitehall street an officer reported as follows: "35, 8 colored." But until now there had been no distinction made.

But before we left the bus the officer shouted emphatically: "Colored boys fall out in the rear." The colored from several buses were herded together, and stood in line until after the white boys had been registered and taken to their tents. This seemed to be the established order of procedure at Camp Dix.

This separation of the colored from the whites was completely and rigidly maintained at this camp. One Puerto Rican, who was darker than I, and who preferred to be with the colored, was regarded as pitifully uninformed by the officers.

Source: Luther C. Wandall, "A Negro in the CCC," *Crisis* Vol. 42 (August, 1935): 244. http://newdeal.feri.org/aaccc/aaccc01.htm

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Pea Pickers, Imperial Valley, California

*Photographer Dorothea Lange, hired by the U.S. government's Farm Security Agency, travelled around the country documenting the working and living conditions of Americans during the Depression. She took this photograph of field laborers in the Imperial Valley region of California. Lange often wrote detailed notes to accompany each photograph, relating bits of information and giving context that might otherwise be lost with visuals alone. This photo of laborers picking peas is followed with a description of their low wages: "*one cent per pound. Hamper holds about twenty eight pounds."

Source: Dorothea Lange, "Pea pickers. Wages (1939): one cent per pound. Hamper holds about twenty eight pounds. Near Niland, Imperial County, California." February, 1939. Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000004589/PP/

We Were Just Okies to Her . . . ": Rev. Billie H. Pate on Moving to California

Billie Pate's family worked as sharecroppers in Texas, farming land owned by someone else and giving the landowner a share, or portion, of the crop they produced each year. During the Depression, crop prices sunk too low to sustain the family. Like other farm families who migrated to California, they were drawn by the promise of work, the hope of eventually being able to own land in an agriculturally rich state, and the knowledge that the state provided higher relief payments than other states. The Pate family migrated in 1935 when Billie was ten. In this oral history excerpt, he describes his work and school experiences in California. Michael Neely interviewed Pate in March 1981 for a San Joaquin regional oral history project.

Pate: So we got here in the fall of 1935 and we were living out in this one ranch and we picked cotton that fall because my father couldn't get a job, and then the winter months came on and they were terribly bad. We lived in the camp with no running water and no inside plumbing...

Neely: Did you pick cotton?

Pate: On the weekends, yes. When it wasn't raining, we worked…

Neely: Did the money go to the children or to the family?

Pate: Family, always to the family. And this was how we survived. We worked. We always worked and even during the next summer when I was eleven—in 1936 I was eleven. We hired out in the fields. At eleven I chopped cotton with adults, and then we chopped cotton, hoed all summer…

We started school also. There was a school at the cotton camp, but my mother didn't want us to go to that school… the school at the camp had many Mexican Americans, and we were not accustomed to these people. We had never been around them and so my mother wasn't comfortable with it at that time…

Probably this was one of the hardest years of my life, the first year we came… for some reason our teacher resented us and made it known that she didn't like the Okies and the Arkies and the Texans… We were really trash to her…

Then there was a term, we were called Okies. Oh, we weren't from Oklahoma—that's just a term for this group. We were just Okies to her and Okies were inferior…

Neely: What were the reactions you had to being treated as trash?

Pate: Oh, I certainly didn't like it because I didn't feel like trash.

Source: "Interview with Rev. Billie H. Pate," California State College, Bakersfield - California Odyssey: The 1930s Migration to the South San Joaquin Valley, pg. 7. http://www.csub.edu/library/_files/DB_files/Pate117.pdf

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A Midwestern Runaway Remembers the CCC

During the Great Depression, many young people left home to search for economic opportunity (and sometimes adventure) on the open roads of America. Jim Mitchell was a sophomore in high school when his father lost his job, sending the family into desperate financial circumstances. Running away from rural Kenosha, Wisconsin, in the winter of 1933, Mitchell eventually joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a federal government program for unemployed youth. In this interview, Mitchell recalls his reasons for joining the CCC and details the life it offered him.

In the CCC you not only learned to live with other guys, you had to go out with a crew and haul logs together. You learned to work as a team.

You worked alongside state foresters who took no nonsense from you. They wanted a day's work and they got it. We had a thousand and one different jobs, from climbing trees to surveying parks. You learned to do a job and do it well. It gave you confidence when you started to become accepted by your peers and to fit in with them.

You had three square meals a day with good food and a good place to sleep. On the road you spent all your time wondering about whether you were going to eat. If you worked it wasn't useful work but just for food. To this day I can go and see parks that we built in the CCC, I can see trees that we planted. It's a living legacy. You didn't have a living legacy on the road.

I stayed in the CCC for two years getting thirty dollars a month. At last I could bring some help to my family. My first letter gave me a big boost:

"Dear son, I want you to know how grateful we are to you and proud, too. The $25 we get each month goes a long way in holding us together. It's good to look Dimitri in the eye and plunk down cash for groceries, and not be obliged to Merriweather for the rent."

For the first time I felt good about myself.

Source: Errol Lincoln Uys, *Riding the Rails: Teenagers on the Move During the Great Depression* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 259-261.

Social Effects of Migratory Labor

The following excerpt is from economist and social activist Paul S. Taylor's 1937 report on migratory farm labor. Already an expert on rural and agricultural economics by the time of the Great Depression, Taylor was hired by the Farm Security Administration to travel throughout the country studying and documenting the impact of the Depression and Dust Bowl on farm laborers. In this concluding section of the report, Taylor explains the difficult living and working conditions experienced by migratory farm laborers and their families.

Migratory agricultural labor is attended [accompanied] by characteristic social problems. First, earnings are low, with all that fact entails [involves]…

Second, housing of migrants (with of course the usual exceptions) is universally a serious problem... In California, the ragged camps of migrants squatting in filth by the roadside, in open fields, along ditch banks, or on garbage dumps fairly beggar description. Large growers frequently provide good housing, but smaller growers with short peak season are often unable to do this…

Third, migrants, like other farm workers, are left relatively unprotected by social security legislation. All the evils of migrant-labor life are aggravated when children must submit to its hardships. I shall mention only that migration cripples the education of the young...Indeed I know of school districts where Mexicans predominate, where in fact the non-attendance at school was preferred, so that the State aid given because of their presence in the district might be spent on the local white American children . . .

To sum it up, migratory farm labor is a focus of poverty, bad health, and evil housing conditions. Its availability in large numbers at low wages aids large-scale agriculture in its competition with the family farm. Migratory laborers are victims of all the prejudices of settled folk against outlanders and nomads, without the advantages of an organized group of their own. They are discriminated against by arbitrary and illegal blockades. They cannot participate in democracy. The education of their children is seriously impaired if not completely neglected. Race prejudices are heightened and labor conflict intensified. Migrants and public welfare suffer alike.

Source: Paul S. Taylor, *Migratory Farm Labor in the United States,* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, March, 1937), 10-12.
https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=txu.059173017254653