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Great Depression



Picture
Migrant Mother
by Dorothea
Lange

Human suffering became a reality for millions of Americans as the Depression continued. Many died of disease resulting from malnutrition. Thousands lost their homes because they could not pay their mortgages. In 1932, at least 25,000 families and more than 200,000 young people wandered through the country seeking food, clothing, shelter, and a job. Many youths traveled in freight trains and lived near train yards in camps called *hobo jungles*. Some homeless, jobless travelers obtained food from welfare agencies or religious missions in towns along the way. Many travelers became ill because they lacked proper food and clothing.

Many people who lost their homes remained in the community. Some crowded into the home of a relative. Others moved to a shabby section of town and built shacks from flattened tin cans and old crates. Groups of these shacks were called *Hoovervilles*, a name that reflected the people's anger and disappointment at President Herbert Hoover's failure to end the Depression.

The Depression did not affect all groups equally. In most U.S. cities and in the South, unemployment rates were much higher for African Americans than for whites. Similarly, women often faced greater difficulty finding jobs than men did. The suffering of the Depression also brought heightened discrimination against Mexican Americans. Many people considered them a drain on the economy because they held many low-paying jobs while other Americans went unemployed. During the 1930's, thousands of Mexican Americans were deported against their wishes.

In 1932, many farmers refused to ship their products to market. They hoped a reduced supply of farm products would help raise the price of these goods. Such farmers' strikes occurred throughout the country, but they centered in Iowa and the surrounding states.

Severe droughts and dust storms hit parts of the Midwest and Southwest during the 1930's. The afflicted region became known as the *Dust Bowl*, and thousands of farm families there were wiped out. Some farmers fled to the fertile agricultural areas of California to look for work. Most who found jobs had to work as fruit or vegetable pickers for extremely low wages. The migrant families crowded into shacks near the fields or camped outdoors. The American author John Steinbeck's famous novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) describes the hardships some migrant families faced during the Depression. See [Dust Bowl](#).



Picture
Dust Bowl in the
Great Plains

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