Great Depression Life and Changes in American Values and Culture

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Period 1
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Impact on Men
Psychological Impact on Men

- As people lost their jobs and life savings, a sense of despair and loss became a staple of the difficulties in the Great Depression.
- Suicide rates increased by 30% and three times as many people were taken to mental hospitals.
- Because the Greatest Generation grew up being poor, they developed the nature of being very money-conscious and would even avoid going to the doctor or dentist just to save money.
Psychological Impact on Men

- On 28 July 1932 a group of discontent WWI veterans and their families called the Bonus Army travelled to Washington in order to demand bonuses for their wartime services.
- When police were unable to break up the group, violence erupted, causing all of the anger felt by many people to come to light.
- By the time the violence ended, four people had been killed, 1,100 people were injured, and the 53,000 veterans and their families had been scattered.
- It would later become apparent that this event turned Americans to the Democratic Party.
Psychological Effects on Men

- Crime rates increased because many unemployed workers were reduced to thieves in order to get food for their families.
- Alcoholism also increased as people searched desperately for an escape from life, especially as the 1933 prohibition was repealed.
- Marriages were delayed because many men waited until they could provide for a family before proposing.
- Men also adopted the “poor man’s divorce” option when abandoning their families: they would simply run away.
Effects on Wives and Children
The Impact on Women

- Since work was heavily “sex-typed”, meaning that certain genders did certain jobs, women had to take over male jobs when the men got taken out of work.

- Because women were paid less than men, it was easy to employ them when they were desperate for work because the family needed a paycheck.
The Impact on Women

- In 1930, about 10.5 million women worked outside the home, and by 1940 there were approximately 13 million women working in fields other than in the home.
- Women were blamed for the lack of jobs for men and were formally charged by female colleges to try to ensure that they would not take roles meant for men.
The Impact on Women

- In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps, a New Deal program, formally decided against hiring women.
- Women took jobs as housekeepers, which enforced the racial and gender stereotypes of primarily African-American women.
The Impact on Children

- Children were forced to learn how to grow up without playing with toys.
- They dropped out of school quickly to find work in order to contribute to the family.
- Many faced abuse due to their fathers losing their jobs.
- The jobs they took were often life-threatening.
- Although child labor was originally seen as acceptable in the beginning of the Great Depression, it soon became seen as morally inappropriate.
The Impact on Children

- Individual states began passing child labor laws restricting the workday hours and age minimum for the young workers.
- In 1904, the National Child Labor Committee was formed with the intent to investigate the issue of child labor and lobby states.
- All attempts were so far ineffective, and in 1910 there were 2 million children still employed.
The Impact on Children

- In 1912, the Children’s Bureau was created. It was an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor.
- In 1916 a bill was proposed by Sen. Robert L. Owen Jr. and Edward Keating
  - Restricted child labor
    - Prevented shipment of products made by kids in factories under 14 yrs
    - Prevented shipment of materials processed by kids in mines under 16 yrs
    - Limited workday to 8 hours.
  - Passed in both houses of Congress
  - Supported strongly by Pres. Woodrow Wilson
The Impact on Children

- This bill was later deemed unconstitutional in 1918 in *Hammer v. Dagenhart* because it was decided that it was directed toward working conditions rather than interstate commerce.
The Impact on Children

- The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 is known to be the major piece of federal legislation for child labor.
  - Prevented children from taking jobs that would threaten their health, education, or wellbeing.
  - No full-time employment of kids under 16, 18 in dangerous jobs.
  - Loophole: kids 14+ could work after school hours
  - Established a minimum wage
The Roosevelts
FDR and Negativity

- With the development of live radio, he was able to broadcast to the country.
- Fireside chats:
  - Delivered 30 during the span of his presidency from 1933 to 1945 (served four terms)
  - Reassured the public
  - Plain-spoken
  - Discussed New Deal policies and later WWII.
FDR and Negativity

- Although the Great Depression was not necessarily shortened by FDR’s efforts, people were better able to cope.
Eleanor Roosevelt and Negativity

- Gave opportunity for Americans to write letters to her.
- Got 300,000 letters/cards in 1933 alone.
- She was widely known to be concerned for the children of America.
Eleanor Roosevelt and Negativity

- These letters allowed her to learn more about Americans’ thoughts on a personal level.
  - Negative thoughts
  - Worries/concerns
  - Thoughts on her and FDR (most praised FDR)
- The American citizens were able to get personal responses from her, which helped them feel supported during the Great Depression.
African Americans and Minorities
African Americans were usually the first ones to get laid off at the beginning.

1932- their unemployment reached 50%.

Those who were able to keep their jobs suffered from wage drops of 50%.
African Americans

- FDR did not make many attempts at giving African Americans greater freedom.
  - The Democrats seated a few black alternates for delegates, but they were separated by chicken wire.
  - FDR had not said anything about race during the 1932 election so as to not offend southern party leaders.
  - Did not complain when the Pres. Wilson set up the Navy with Jim Crow laws.
African Americans

- The First Hundred Days did not give attention to the concerns of African Americans.
- The National Recovery Administration made many codes that resulted in African Americans being paid less than people doing the same jobs in a different place.
- Many whites felt that if they could barely make as much as African Americans were, that they should have work before the African Americans did.
Mexican Americans

- Widespread discrimination.
- Could not get Union membership, Unions encouraged Congress not to put antidiscrimination pieces out of laws of the New Deal.
- Mexican immigrants who had come between 1900 and 1930 were blamed for the lack of jobs.
Mexican Americans

- Deportation of Mexican Americans
  - 1929-1932
  - 365,000 people. (75,000 from LA)

- The New Deal hurt and helped them
  - Limited relief assistance
  - Agricultural Adjustment Administration cost many jobs.
  - Civilian Conservation Corps and National Youth Administration gave jobs to the youth.
Native Americans

- Had lost most of their land.
- Poverty, poor educations and access to health services.
- Had already been in a depression, much like other minorities.

Indian New Deal:
- 1930s
- Ickes and Collier
- Supported political/cultural nature of tribes
- Gave better social service
John Collier

- 4 May 1884- 8 May 1968
- Commissioner of Indian Affairs
- Helped in shaping federal policy for Native Americans through the Indian Reorganization Act (1934).
  - Did not force them to assimilate.
  - Encouraged the tribes to be able to take care of themselves.
  - Provided land rights, religious, education freedom.
Collier

- He also established the Civilian Conservation Corps Indian Division (CCC-ID):
  - Sponsored reservation programs.
  - Employed men from 18 to 24 year old to work for conservation projects.
  - Collier got $100 million from Congress in order to work on irrigation, soil erosion, and road construction projects.
  - Provided income for unemployed men.
The Dust Bowl
The Dust Bowl

- **Location:**
  - Southern Great Plains
  - SE Colorado, NE New Mexico, W Kansas, Texas, and Oklahoma

- **When:**
  - The 1930s

- **Reason for name:**
  - A giant dust storm aka a black blizzard hit the area 14 April 1935.
The Dust Bowl - The Cause

- Weak-holding soil that had been blown onto the southern Great Plains since the prehistoric era.
- Settlement of the area and drought resulted in dust.
- Farmers ploughed the land for crops, digging churning the dirt and loosening it dangerously.
After a drought came to the southern Great Plains in 1931, dust storms began arising.
The dust made breathing difficult and dangerous.
Train tracks were blocked by the dust, so work crews had to shovel it away.
It was dangerous to go outside, and people would put towels under their doors to keep the dust out.
Health was compromised

- The dust (silica) caused irritation in the mucus membranes.
- Many people got what was called “dust pneumonia” and many died.
- Surgeons and dentists were faced with the problem of sterilization.
The Dust Bowl - Soil

- FDR ordered the Forest Service to plant many trees to reduce wind erosion.
- Known as the Shelterbelt Project
  - 1933
  - 100 mi wide
  - Canada- Northern Texas
  - Rows of trees would slow down the winds and prevent more dust from forming and moving around.
  - By 1942, 60% of the almost 18,600 miles of “shelterbelts” that were planted survived.
The Dust Bowl- Soil

- The Soil Conservation Service helped farmers control the dust on their lands.
  - Encouraged proper tilling/planting practices
    - Contour plowing, terracing, strip cropping, drought resistant crops.
- The Resettlement Administration started purchasing land in 1935 to restore soil health.
  - Moved farmers to lands owned by the federal gov’t.
- Result of these efforts:
  - Unprecedented environmental/social planning experiment.
The Dust Bowl - Migrations

- There were not extreme numbers of people who left.
- John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* encompassed the migrants but in the setting of the cotton region.
- Migrations:
  - 1930-1940 Oklahoma Panhandle counties lost 8,762 people.
  - Most moved to next towns
  - Texas’s 23 counties lost less than 15,000.
  - SW Kansas saw an increase 1930-1935 as people escaped to their counties.
  - They then lost 18-53% 1935-1940.
The End of The Dust Bowl

- 1938 spring, rain increased, small plants started growing again.
- Dust storms decreased drastically.
- By 1939, 9.5 Mill acres still suffering as compared to 50 Mill acres in 1935.
- By 1940s, conditions were almost back to normal.
Drought refugees, USA, 1936
Origin and Purpose

- **Origin:**
  - Photograph by Dorothea Lange in 1936.
  - Image of a mother and her children in a tent in Nipomo, CA.

- **Purpose:**
  - To show the hardships faced by Great Depression refugees during the 1930s.
  - The mother is a widow with seven children, all living in a single tent.
  - This shows the raw truth of the suffering that migrants faced, being forced to travel across the country in an attempt to find jobs and food, even water.
Value and Limitation

- **Value:**
  - The photographer was there, recording the circumstances so she was very close to the subject.

- **Limitation:**
  - It is not evident if the picture is entirely un-staged.
  - There are not many limitations because the image is a real photograph that depicts a situation without needing to use words.
Economic Perceptions
Economic Perceptions

- Huge impact on the economy, which brought changes in people’s views.
- People’s views on capitalism changed greatly
  - Increases in protests and anti-capitalist movements
  - Third parties emerged but none were take over the Rep-Dem parties.
  - FDR spent time staying on the Left side’s good side. Tried to save capitalism but leftists still supported him.
Money and output in the United States

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Economic Perceptions

- Socialist and Communist groups grew.
  - 1932 Socialist party had 15,000 members and had a larger ring of support.
  - Communist Party supported Roosevelt 1936 on.
- Roosevelt kept the radical movement on his side in a number of ways:
  - Included left-wing protests in New Deal.
  - Incorporated his words in the demands of the groups
  - Got the leaders of the groups to follow him
Economic Perceptions

- FDR said that to save capitalism from itself they would have to equalize the wealth distribution.
- Ran 1936 campaign as a “progressive coalition” instead of a Democratic Party activity.
- This would please the communist and socialist groups who felt that the distribution of wealth was unfair.
- No third party took over because FDR integrated their views into his presidency.
Government Dependence
Gov’t Dependence

- People began to depend on the gov’t for work and support.
  - The Works Progress Administration (WPA) – hired people to work on gov’t building projects.
  - The Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) – gave incentive payments to farmers as a way to restrict production to raise agriculture prices.
  - The Social Security Act 1935 established help for the elderly.
Gov’t Dependence

- Resettlement Administration moved farmers to federally owned lands.
- US Gov’t est. Securities and Exchange Commission 1934 to take care of stock issues and market trading practices.
The Red Decade
The Red Decade

- With increasing interest in socialism and communism, the 1930s became a period highly involved with communism.
- 1934 William Randolph Hearst tried to start a new “Red Scare” by sending spies to universities in order to find “red professors”.
The Red Decade

  - Ex. Eleanor Roosevelt, even Mohandas Gandhi.
- The belief that Communists were involved in the New Deal spread widely, along with the idea that they were in universities and CIO.
- People quickly became paranoid, contributing to the later issues in the Cold War.
Popular Culture
Popular Culture

- Contrasted with 1920’s views - emphasis on simplicity.
- Movies had a glamorous look but clothes were regularly mended.
- Very few movies dealt with the poor and unemployed, most were musicals, comedies, or romances.
- Warner Brothers made gangster sagas about the poor.
The Grapes of Wrath 1940 was released as a movie version of John Steinbeck’s Great Depression novel.

The popular book depicted the hardships of those affected by the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl.

While other movies focused on glamour to distract people from their suffering, this movie focused on the truth.
Popular Culture

- Baseball was changed greatly
  - Salaries were cut
  - 14 minor leagues eliminated
  - Night games introduced

- Radio became widely used
  - Not for radicalizing Americans but for entertainment
  - Soap operas, music, variety broadcasts
Popular Culture

- People went to more libraries as they could not afford to buy books.
- Games became increasingly popular: puzzles, card games, Monopoly.
- Some music attempted to encompass the suffering of society.
  - Dance-oriented, upbeat
  - “tonic for recovery”
  - Many songs had positive subjects as a distraction, but sadder songs existed in the mix, ex. Bing Crosby’s “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?”


Works Cited


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