

Topic 6: Analyze the ways in which the Great Depression altered the American social fabric in the 1930's.



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Thesis

The Great Depression, and the many hardships that accompanied it, greatly altered American society in the 1930s in many ways such as changes to family, disillusionment with the government, and changes for farmers.



Farmers



The Great Depression had a great affect on farmers. Without income many farmers were forced off the land they could no longer afford. As if this wasn't enough, Mother Nature added to their woes. Due to a long drought and loose soil (due to poor farming practices), the Great Plains soon transformed into the aptly named Dust Bowl. Winds would pick up the loose, dusty topsoil and form large, rolling "storms" of dust. Many farmers simply set off with their families in hopes of finding a job elsewhere. Many farmers from Oklahoma and Arkansas set off to California, a state supposedly with jobs to offer. These migrants became known as Okies and Arkies. It's because of this migration that "Little Oklahomas" sprouted up in Southern California and with them the culture of the Great Plains. In addition, the book "Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck was based off the migration of one Okie family to California, revealing the many hardship felt during the Depression.



Family



The Great Depression greatly altered the life of countless American families. The Depression altered families in different ways. Some families grew closer together as they faced hard times together, as they were forced to rely on each other for survival, entertainment, support, and more. On the other hand, some families were splintered as family members set off on their own. The Great Depression also led to a decrease in marriages, birth rates, and divorces. In addition the Great Depression brought about a change in the household. Many men lost their jobs and with it their role as breadwinner leading to many feeling like failures, as they could no longer support their families. Many women also had to change their lifestyle as they struggled to care for their families. This meant finding ways to stretch money further, finding resourceful ways to reuse and refurbish. In some cases, women became the primary source of income for a family due to abandonment or unemployment of their spouse.



Disillusionment



Many Americans became disillusioned with government and president Hoover during the Depression. The president, who was once ushered into office by a supportive population, was now blamed for the hard times occurring during his presidency. The many shanty towns popping up in cities were named after him, these centers of poverty and unemployment known as Hoovervilles. Perhaps the greatest blow to his reputation was his handling of the Bonus Army. World War I veterans were promised a bonus following the service during the war, payable in 1945. However, given the new economic hardships, thousands of veterans demanded the entire payment of their promised bonus. Together, about twenty thousand veterans marched upon the capital, setting up a massive Hooverville, demanding their bonus. Following a riot that killed two veterans, Hoover commanded the army to disperse the unwanted residents. Led by General Douglas MacArthur, the soldiers used various crowd control methods such as the use of tear gas to drive the veterans out. MacArthur followed this up by burning the shanty town to the ground, in what was a far greater response than Hoover wanted. Following the army turning on veterans Hoovers ratings plummeted further and disillusionment with the government grew.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Great Depression was a time of great hardship for American society, which changed during the years of economic difficulty, as illustrated by such events as the Okie migration and the dispersion of the Bonus Army.