

SSUSH17 Analyze the causes and consequences of the Great Depression.

b. Explain factors (include over-farming and climate) that led to the Dust Bowl and the resulting movement and migration west.

The Dust Bowl is a symbol of overproduction and was a contributing factor to the economic decline of the 1930s. The Dust Bowl originated in the southern plains of the United States. Farmers first arrived in the region at the end of the Nineteenth Century. The Homestead Act and the region's rich soil drew them west at that time. Farmers in the region talked of the rich, fertile soil and were soon producing high yield crops of wheat, corn, cotton, and livestock. However, unknown to the farmers, the Great Plains region experiences regular wet and dry weather cycles.

The southern Plains were in a wet period when farmers first arrived. Spurred on by the soil's fertility and strong demand for grain during World War I, farmers planted thousands of acres of marginal land in crops. Beginning in 1931, the region entered into a dry cycle. The drought was the worst in United States history, covering more than 75% of the country and severely affecting 27 states.

Year after year, farmers continued to plant wheat and cotton despite the failure of crops. Deep plowing killed the prairie grasses that held together the topsoil. Winds soon began blowing the dry topsoil away. Dust clouds formed that were thousands of feet high and miles wide. The dust storms and drought lasted nearly ten years.

Although two-thirds of families remained in the region, a large group of sharecroppers and tenant farmers left the farms of Oklahoma, Texas, and eastern Colorado and settled in the central California farming region. Without money, many became migrant farm workers who worked the vegetable, fruit, and cotton harvests of the west coast. The migrants became known as "Okies" and were the subject of John Steinbeck's popular book, *The Grapes of Wrath*. The Dust Bowl eventually ended in 1938, when rains returned and the Soil Conservation Act was passed encouraging better plowing methods in the region.

Define

Dust Bowls

1. What were the factors that led to the Dust Bowl?
2. Who are Okies?

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c. Explain the social and political impact of widespread unemployment that resulted in developments such as Hoovervilles.

By 1933, twenty-five percent of the labor force was unemployed in the United States and millions more could only find part time jobs. In 1932, *Fortune Magazine* reported that 34 million people belonged to families with no regular, full-time wage earner. There were two million homeless people migrating around the country. Women and minorities were especially hard hit. Women, many of whom were single parents, were often fired because many businesses felt jobs should go to men first. Blacks were often the first laid-off only to be replaced by White workers. Children were often malnourished. While there were some public assistance programs and private charities, they were quickly overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of those who needed assistance. Men abandoned their families to search for work and, when they were unable to find a job, did not return home out of shame. Some teenagers were asked to leave home and find a job to support themselves when their families were increasingly unable to do so. Homeless families, lacking shelter, used cardboard and packing crates to create encampments called Hoovervilles. The name was meant to cast criticism on President Hoover and his handling of the economic crisis.

While in office, Herbert Hoover attempted to diminish the impact of the Great Depression by creating work relief programs that included the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge and the Boulder (later Hoover) Dam. He attempted to slow home foreclosures by asking the Federal government to guarantee home loans. However, his programs

appeared to the public as too little, too late. He had been reluctant to involve the government early in the economic crisis. It was not until the situation was severe that he began to act and at that point his efforts had minimal impact. In 1932, Hoover ran for re-election. The Democratic candidate for President was Franklin D. Roosevelt, who publicly blamed Hoover for the Great Depression. Hoover lost the election by a very wide margin, obtaining only 39.7% of the popular vote compared to Roosevelt's 57.4%.

Define

Hoovervilles

- 1. How high was unemployment during the Great Depression?**
- 2. What were the social and political impacts of widespread unemployment that resulted in Hoovervilles?**
- 3. Why do you think Hoover lost re-election?**