



1929

The Great Depression

In 1929, 15 million Americans were out of the workforce and 45 million were unemployed. Approximately 60 percent of blacks were unemployed and had to seek welfare assistance in order to survive. Detroit was especially hard hit because of extensive losses suffered by the auto industry.

Car sales dropped and the auto industry had no choice but to lay off its employees. At the Ford Rouge plant alone, 60,000 blacks were out of work from a combination of war production, decrease in sales, and high overhead.

African American farmers and sharecroppers living in the South suffered greatly from the depression and from government programs that decreased production to try and drive prices up.



¹ Black sharecroppers picking cotton
From the Collections of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History

² Blacks in the Great Depression <http://www.coffeypark.com/harlem/era.htm>
Courtesy of Margaret Bourke-White

³ Bank Closure
Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University

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Credits:

Peterson, Joyce Shaw. *American Automobile Workers, 1900-1933*. State University of New York Press, 1987. Print.

Schultz, Stanley. *The Great Depression: A Primary Source History*. Gareth Stevens Publishing, 2005. Print.

Weaver, Robert C. "The New Deal has aided Blacks." In *The Great Depression: Opposing Viewpoints*, edited by William Dudley, 176-182. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, Inc, 1994. Print.

Keywords/Topics:

Politics & Legal Issues, Work/Jobs

Questions:

1. What were two causes of the Great Depression?
2. How did the Great Depression affect the African American community?
3. What relief did the U.S. government offer during the Great Depression?

Links to Internet Websites:

<http://www.coffeypark.com/harlem/era.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/elro/glossary/great-depression.htm>

<http://newdeal.feri.org/nchs/teach.htm>

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From the Collections of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History

Within the New Deal and the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the government offered Farm relief that paid farmers to reduce acreage and produce less product. By decreasing production the government hoped that demand would rise and therefore the prices would also rise. For African American farmers, who were often sharecroppers or renters, the AAA did not offer much relief. Black farmers relied on white land owners to pay them a portion of the government funds, but this often did not occur. During these difficult years the incentive to travel north for higher paying jobs was no longer an option for southern farmers.

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Courtesy of Margaret Bourke-White, masters-of-photography.com

This image, by Margaret Bourke-White, shows African American flood victims waiting to receive bread through the Red Cross Relief, ironically standing in front of a poster proclaiming the “American Way.”

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Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University

To add to the tensions already surrounding most urban families, on Tuesday October 29th the stock market crashed. Many businesses and families were financially ruined after the crash. African Americans, who were often the first to be fired, were laid off immediately to make room for white employees. Along with World War I, the stock market crash became one of the leading causes of the Great Depression in the United States.

In the above image, Detroiters wait for a Hamtramck bank to open. Because of the crash, thousands of banks went out of business, causing many to lose their life savings.