

# The Great Depression

The stock market crashed in October 1929. After that, a lot of companies closed. People lost their jobs. They had lost their savings when the banks closed. So, many people had no money. Families sold all they had. They bought food. But then their cash ran out. They had nothing. Many people felt desperate (DES-puh-ruht). They were scared. They didn't know what to do.

Some people packed up their few belongings. They went from town to town. They looked for jobs. They lived in their cars. If a family did not have a car, they walked. They had to find shelter at night. At times, they slept under bridges. Sometimes, they made shacks. They used old boards and boxes for houses. Getting through the Great Depression (dih-PRESH-uhn) was hard for most Americans. It took the nation a long time to recover.



## On the Road

Many farms in the Midwest were no good. There had been a long drought in which little rain fell. So, the land was dry. When the wind blew, it caused dust storms. A lot of Midwest families left their farms. They went west. They hoped life would be good in California. These people were migrants (MY-gruhntz). They were called that since they moved around. But the Californians did not like them. They did not want to compete for jobs. They called the newcomers Okies. Why? Many of them came from the state of Oklahoma.

Most migrants lived in camps. The camps had tents for sleeping. Many people found work on farms in California. They moved from camp to camp. They followed crops. First, they picked cherries. Next, they picked peaches. Then, they picked apples and so on. Life was still hard. But at least they had food.

## A New Leader

In 1933, Americans elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt president. He made a famous speech. This was his inaugural (ih-NAW-gyuh-ruhl) speech. It was the first speech he gave as president. President Roosevelt said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." These were brave words in the Great Depression. People trusted him. They thought he could get the country working better.



President Roosevelt had a plan. He called it the New Deal. It did not end the depression. But, it helped with some of the problems. It gave Americans hope in democracy. Other nations hit by the depression turned to dictators (DIK-tay-terz) like Hitler. A dictator has complete power and does not allow freedom. The New Deal helped people in need. The government made jobs for people. It paid them to build parks and roads. President Roosevelt did not want children to have to work. He wanted them in school. He wanted everyone to have a home and good food. President Roosevelt's plan lifted the spirits of people.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was a big help. She talked to the American people. She asked them questions. Then, she told her husband what she learned. Without her, President Roosevelt would not have known just what Americans needed.

### War Helps the American Economy

By the late 1930s, war had broken out again in Europe. There was fighting in Asia, too. The United States could not live in isolation (i-suh-LAY-shuhn). That meant that it could not ignore the rest of the world. Yet, the United States did not want to join the war. So, President Roosevelt started the Lend-Lease Program. It was a way to help both the United States and other nations. Soon, U.S. factories were making things for the war. Countries overseas needed supplies. They wanted blankets, uniforms, ships, and planes. Making these things meant a lot of jobs for Americans. More people were hired every day.

More women started to work. African Americans were hired. Wages, or pay, got better. Making things for World War II helped to end the Great Depression. America was getting back on its feet.



### Comprehension Question

Tell two things President Roosevelt's plan did.