great depression apush definition

great depression apush definition is a fundamental term in the study of American history, particularly within the Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) curriculum. This term refers to the severe worldwide economic downturn that began in 1929 and lasted through much of the 1930s, profoundly affecting the United States and the global economy. Understanding the great depression apush definition is crucial for grasping the economic, social, and political transformations that shaped modern America. This article provides an in-depth exploration of the Great Depression, covering its causes, major events, government responses, and its lasting impacts on American society and policy. Additionally, it offers a detailed examination tailored to the APUSH framework, helping students and educators alike to contextualize this pivotal era. The following sections will outline the main aspects of the Great Depression, its definition in APUSH terms, and its significance in U.S. history.

- Definition and Overview of the Great Depression
- Causes of the Great Depression
- Key Events During the Great Depression
- Government Response and the New Deal
- Social and Cultural Impact
- Legacy and Historical Significance in APUSH

Definition and Overview of the Great Depression

The great depression apush definition refers to the period of severe economic decline that started with the stock market crash of 1929 and extended through the 1930s. It is characterized by widespread unemployment, bank failures, deflation, and a significant contraction in industrial production. In APUSH, the Great Depression is studied as a critical turning point that exposed weaknesses in the American economy and prompted major federal intervention. The era is defined by its duration, intensity, and the profound hardships it imposed on millions of Americans.

Economic Characteristics

The Great Depression saw a drastic decline in consumer spending and investment, leading to a downward economic spiral. Industrial output fell by nearly 50%, and unemployment rates soared to approximately 25%. Many banks collapsed, wiping out savings for countless families, while agricultural prices plummeted, devastating rural communities.

Geographic and Demographic Impact

The economic crisis affected urban and rural areas differently but was nearly universal in its hardship. While industrial centers faced factory closures, rural America suffered from both economic collapse and environmental disasters like the Dust Bowl. Minority groups and women experienced unique challenges during this period, often facing greater economic insecurity.

Causes of the Great Depression

Understanding the causes of the Great Depression is essential within the APUSH framework to analyze how economic policies and global conditions contributed to the crisis. Multiple factors combined to create the perfect storm that triggered the economic collapse.

Stock Market Crash of 1929

The stock market crash in October 1929 is often cited as the immediate catalyst for the Great Depression. Speculative investments and margin buying had inflated stock prices beyond sustainable levels. When confidence faltered, massive sell-offs led to a rapid decline in market values, erasing billions of dollars in wealth.

Bank Failures and Financial Panic

Following the crash, a wave of bank failures swept across the country. Without federal insurance, depositors lost their savings, which triggered widespread panic and further withdrawals. The resulting credit contraction severely limited business investment and consumer spending.

Overproduction and Underconsumption

During the 1920s, American industries produced more goods than consumers could purchase. This imbalance led to falling prices and unsold inventory, causing companies to cut back on production and lay off workers, which in turn reduced purchasing power even further.

International Economic Problems

The global economy was interconnected, and issues such as high war debts, reparations, and restrictive trade policies exacerbated the downturn. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, which raised tariffs on imported goods, worsened trade relations and deepened the global recession.

Key Events During the Great Depression

The Great Depression era encompasses several significant events that illustrate the depth of the crisis and its progression over time.

The Dust Bowl

The Dust Bowl was an environmental disaster that struck the Great Plains during the 1930s, compounding the economic suffering of farmers. Severe drought and poor agricultural practices caused massive dust storms that destroyed crops and displaced thousands of families.

Unemployment Crisis

Unemployment reached unprecedented levels, with millions of Americans out of work. This widespread joblessness led to increased poverty, homelessness, and reliance on charitable aid and government relief programs.

Banking Crisis and Failures

Bank closures reached a peak in the early 1930s, with thousands of institutions failing nationwide. The lack of confidence in the banking system prompted reforms and the establishment of federal safeguards.

Government Response and the New Deal

The federal government's response to the Great Depression is a major focus in APUSH studies, highlighting the evolution of American political and economic policy during crisis.

Herbert Hoover's Approach

Initially, President Hoover advocated for limited government intervention, emphasizing voluntary cooperation and local relief efforts. However, as the crisis deepened, his policies were widely regarded as insufficient, leading to public discontent.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal

Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency marked a dramatic shift in federal policy with the introduction of the New Deal programs. These initiatives aimed to provide immediate relief, economic recovery, and structural reforms to prevent future depressions.

Major New Deal Programs

- **Social Security Act**: Established a system of old-age pensions and unemployment insurance.
- **Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)**: Insured bank deposits to restore public confidence.
- **Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)**: Provided jobs in environmental conservation for young men.
- **Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)**: Developed infrastructure and electricity in the Tennessee Valley region.
- **Works Progress Administration (WPA)**: Created millions of jobs in public works projects.

Social and Cultural Impact

The Great Depression reshaped American society and culture, influencing art, literature, and social attitudes.

Changes in Family and Gender Roles

Economic hardship forced many families to adapt, with shifts in traditional gender roles as women often sought work to support households. The stress of poverty also affected family dynamics and social behavior.

Impact on Minorities

Minority groups, including African Americans, Native Americans, and immigrants, faced heightened discrimination and economic challenges during the Depression. However, some New Deal programs aimed to provide support, albeit often unevenly.

Cultural Expressions

The era inspired notable works in literature, music, and visual arts that reflected the struggles and resilience of the American people. Artists and writers documented the human experience of the Depression, contributing to a rich cultural legacy.

Legacy and Historical Significance in APUSH

The great depression apush definition encapsulates not only the economic downturn but also the profound transformations in American government and society it precipitated. The period reshaped the role of the federal government, established social welfare policies, and influenced subsequent economic theories and practices.

Shift in Government Philosophy

The New Deal expanded the scope of federal authority and responsibility, marking a departure from previous laissez-faire attitudes. This shift laid the groundwork for modern welfare and regulatory policies.

Influence on Future Generations

The Great Depression served as a cautionary tale and a catalyst for reforms aimed at preventing similar crises. Its lessons continue to inform economic and political discourse in the United States.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Great Depression in APUSH terms?

In APUSH, the Great Depression refers to the severe worldwide economic downturn that began with the stock market crash of 1929 and lasted through the 1930s, resulting in widespread unemployment, poverty, and significant changes in U.S. economic policies.

How is the Great Depression defined in APUSH?

The Great Depression is defined in APUSH as a prolonged period of economic hardship in the United States during the 1930s, characterized by massive unemployment, bank failures, and deflation, which led to major government interventions under the New Deal.

What were the main causes of the Great Depression according to APUSH?

According to APUSH, the main causes of the Great Depression include stock market speculation, bank failures, reduction in consumer spending, high tariffs, declining international trade, and structural weaknesses in the economy.

How did the Great Depression impact American society in APUSH?

The Great Depression caused widespread unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and social unrest in America, leading to changes in family dynamics, migration patterns, and increased support for government relief programs as studied in APUSH.

What role did the stock market crash play in the Great Depression per APUSH?

In APUSH, the 1929 stock market crash is seen as the catalyst that triggered the Great Depression, leading to loss of wealth, reduced consumer confidence, and a cascade of bank failures and business closures.

How does APUSH describe the government's response to the Great Depression?

APUSH describes the government's response as a series of New Deal programs initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt aimed at relief, recovery, and reform to combat the economic crisis and prevent future depressions.

What is the significance of the New Deal in the context of the Great Depression in APUSH?

The New Deal is significant in APUSH as it marks a major shift in U.S. government policy toward active intervention in the economy, providing social safety nets and regulatory reforms during the Great Depression.

How is the Great Depression linked to changes in U.S. economic policy in APUSH?

APUSH highlights that the Great Depression led to a transformation in U.S. economic policy, including increased government regulation of banks and markets, the establishment of Social Security, and the expansion of federal programs to support the unemployed.

What lessons does APUSH emphasize from the Great Depression?

APUSH emphasizes lessons such as the dangers of unregulated financial markets, the importance of government intervention during economic crises, and the social consequences of prolonged economic hardship.

How is the Great Depression used in APUSH to understand modern economic challenges?

In APUSH, the Great Depression serves as a historical example to understand the causes and effects of economic collapse, the role of government in economic recovery, and the impact of economic policy on society, informing responses to modern economic challenges.

Additional Resources

1. *The Great Depression: America 1929-1941*
This book by Robert S. McElvaine offers a comprehensive overview of the Great Depression, focusing on its impact on American society, politics, and economy. It provides detailed insights into the causes of the economic collapse and the responses by the government and citizens. The narrative blends personal stories with broader historical analysis, making it accessible for APUSH students.

2. *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*
Written by Studs Terkel, this book compiles firsthand accounts from people who lived through the Great Depression. It captures the human side of the economic crisis, revealing the struggles and resilience of ordinary Americans. This oral history is valuable for understanding the social and cultural dimensions of the era.

3. *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl*
By Timothy Egan, this book focuses on the Dust Bowl, a critical environmental disaster during the Great Depression. It explores how drought and poor farming practices devastated the Great Plains and worsened the economic hardships for many families. The book offers a vivid portrayal of the intersection between environmental and economic crises.

4. *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism*
This book by Sidney M. Milkis and Jerome M. Mileur examines the New Deal policies implemented by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in response to the Great Depression. It analyzes how these reforms reshaped American government and society, laying the foundation for modern liberalism. The text is essential for understanding the political shifts during the APUSH period.

5. *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*
Authored by David M. Kennedy, this Pulitzer Prize-winning book covers the Great Depression and World War II, linking the two pivotal events in American history. Kennedy provides a detailed account of the

economic challenges and the federal government's efforts to combat them. The book is known for its clear writing and thorough research, making it a staple for APUSH students.

6. *The Great Depression and the New Deal: A Very Short Introduction*
Eric Rauchway's concise book introduces the key concepts and events of the Great Depression and the New Deal era. It breaks down complex economic policies and their social impacts in an accessible manner. This book is ideal for students seeking a brief yet informative summary of the period.

7. *Daughters of the Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s*
By Susan Ware, this book explores the experiences of women during the Great Depression, focusing on their roles in the workforce and cultural representation. It highlights how the economic crisis affected gender roles and inspired literature of the time. The book adds a valuable gender perspective to the study of the Great Depression.

8. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*
William Julius Wilson's book, while focusing on a later period, provides insight into the long-term effects of economic downturns like the Great Depression on urban poverty and unemployment. It helps contextualize the social consequences of economic crises in American history. The analysis is useful for drawing parallels with the Great Depression era.

9. *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*
By Michael Kazin, this book traces the history of populist movements in the U.S., including those during the Great Depression. It explains how economic hardship fueled political activism and shaped public opinion. The work is important for understanding the political climate and popular responses during the Great Depression in APUSH studies.

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