

Summary: The Great Depression

The Depression Years

In the late 1920s, businesses and factories began to close. People lost their jobs. Economic depression spread across the country and the world. This period in the 1930s became known as the Great Depression.

In California, the Great Depression affected many industries. Banks closed. Oil companies lost money. People had little money to spend. In 1932, farms made half as much money as three years earlier. Many farmers lost their land. As banks and businesses closed, unemployment rose. By 1932, more than one-fourth of the state's workforce had no work. Without jobs people lost their homes.

By 1934, the country was also suffering from the worst drought in its history. Farmland in many states was ruined, soil dried up, and terrible dust storms turned the sky black and covered everything in dirt. The region most affected by the drought was called the Dust Bowl. As farms in the Dust Bowl failed, hundreds of thousands of people headed to California hoping for work and a new beginning.

The New Deal

Life in California was difficult for migrants. Jobs were scarce. The migrants in California were called Okies, because so many were from Oklahoma. John Steinbeck wrote a famous novel about the migrants, *The Grapes of Wrath*. When Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in 1932, he convinced Congress to pass new laws. His plan for recovery, called the New Deal, helped keep banks in business and protect people's savings. The New Deal created programs to put people back to work. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) employed millions of citizens to build bridges, schools, dams, and roads. In California, the WPA paid workers to build hiking trails in national parks. One of the biggest New Deal projects in California was the Central Valley Project. Over several decades, workers built dams and canals to control water for farmers. The Shasta Dam helped turn the Central Valley into a rich farming area. But it destroyed important wetlands, a natural habitat of birds and fish.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

depression *noun*, a time when many people can't find work and businesses close

unemployment *noun*, not having a job

drought *noun*, a long, dry period with little or no rain



After You Read

REVIEW Why did some people move to California during the Great

Depression? Circle the sentence that tells why people moved to California.

REVIEW What was the Works Progress Administration? Highlight the sentence that explains what the WPA did.