

Describe How The Great Depression Affected Ordinary Americans

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### **Describe How The Great Depression Affected Ordinary Americans**

The Great Depression affected ordinary Americans by drastically changing life as they knew it. As the economy spiraled downward the standard of living that many Americans had become accustomed to faced many uncertainties. Many Americans lost their jobs or were forced to take a decrease in pay. The loss of wages caused many hardships for families. Many Americans did not have enough money to meet loan payments or buy groceries to feed their families. The collapse of the banking system and the stock market caused many to lose their entire life savings or even the loss of property.

In 1932 “one-quarter of the American workforce was unemployed” and with no federal assistance programs the unemployed swamped state and private charities in order to feed their families (Roark, et. al., p.697). Despite state and private charities many Americans still had little or no food and were in fear of being homeless. Family dynamics changed as one parent would leave the home in search of work or if they became homeless would pack what they could take and look for migrant work. To make ends meet both parents sought work, often the mother would find work in jobs that were not seen socially acceptable for men at the time such as clerical or service industry positions (Konkel), but the wages were often lower than that of males. To fight dying of starvation desperate Americans would do anything to feed their family. They would steal, scavenge through dumpsters, or kept leftovers from diner’s plates if lucky enough to have a restaurant job (Roark, et. al.,2020). Still many Americans died of starvation (Roark et. al., 2020). Laborers were not the only ones to suffer losses, “upper middle-class professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, saw their incomes drop by as much as 40 percent” (Konkel).

Families learned to make meals go further by making casseroles and one-pot meals or attend potluck dinners at local churches (Konkel). They mended their clothes instead of buying new and stretched their resources as far as they could. Vacant city lots became vegetable and herbs gardens as well as kitchen window sills. Since many Americans did not have money to spend on entertainment, neighbors started hanging out playing board or card games such as Scrabble and Monopoly (Konkel). The families also sat around the radio and listened to sports, soap operas, news, and comedies. The Great Depression affected almost all Americans regardless of socioeconomic status in one way or another.

## Reference

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Roark, James L. "Chapter 23 From ERA to Great Depression 1920-1932." *The American Promise: A History of the United States*. Vol. 2. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2020. 609-12. Print.