

The Great Depression in Louisiana



As you read, look for:

- the causes of the Great Depression,
- how the Great Depression affected Louisiana, and
- vocabulary terms **Great Depression**, **Civilian Conservation Corps**, and **Works Progress Administration**.

Much of Huey Long's power came from people who were struggling economically. Long's political programs and his Share Our Wealth program were influenced by the economic crisis of the time.

The United States saw its economy shift from the boom of the Roaring Twenties to a depression that lasted ten years. The stock market crash of October 24, 1929, signaled that change.

During the **Great Depression**, unemployment reached the highest level the United States had ever measured. By 1937, a government study described the South as the nation's number one economic problem.

Living Through the Depression

Louisiana had just begun to see economic recovery and growth after the poverty that followed the Civil War. The Great Depression halted all economic growth and brought even more poverty. Much of Louisiana's economy still depended on

cotton. But during the depression, farmers could not make a living selling their cotton crops. The price of cotton, 25 cents a pound in 1929, fell to 5 cents a pound in 1932.

Most residents of rural Louisiana were fairly self-sufficient, a fact that proved useful during the hardships of the depression. Farmers could at least feed their families by planting gardens. Those who lived in towns and cities had a much harder time. Planting a garden was not possible if you lived on a small lot in



town or in a city apartment. Some rural families took in their city relatives to keep them from starving. One resident of Assumption Parish recalled her depression years: “We did not know where our next meal was coming from and then someone would share from their gardens.”

The New Deal in Louisiana

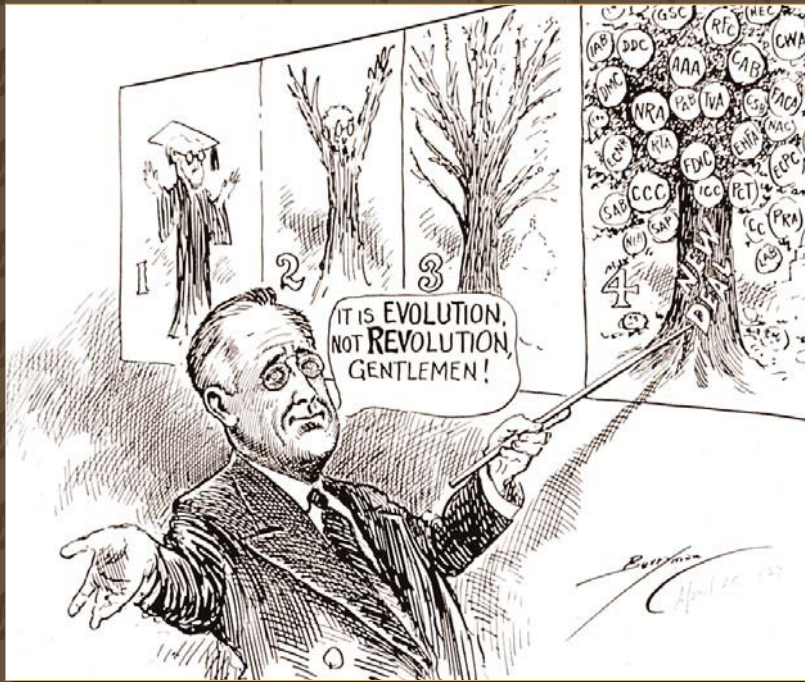
When Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president in 1932, he took strong steps to help the economy. On March 9, 1933, he ordered a bank “holiday.” Banks were closed and not allowed to reopen until they could prove they were sound (financially safe). Until they were approved to reopen, they could only pay out 5 percent of their total deposits in emergency funds. This prevented a “run” on the banks, which occurs when many depositors demand to withdraw their money at the same time. Banks do not keep cash on hand equal to all deposits because they loan depositors’ money to others or invest it in interest-paying assets.

National banks had to be approved for reopening by the United States government. State banks had to get approval from the state committee on banking to reopen.

Above: As Franklin Roosevelt campaigned in 1932, he spread a feeling of optimism that times would get better.

Opposite page: Farmers and agricultural workers were already suffering in 1929. The Great Depression made their lives much more difficult. These children playing jacks near Pontchatoula worked as strawberry pickers.

The Art of Politics



This 1934 political cartoon pokes fun at President Roosevelt and the many “alphabet” agencies created under the New Deal.

Lagniappe

Young men in the CCC were paid \$30 a month, of which \$25 had to be sent home to their families.

ening, beans, corn meal, flour, sugar, and rice. Farmers also benefited when their crops were bought to be used as commodities.

Another New Deal program was the **Civilian Conservation Corps** (CCC). This program provided work for single young men between the ages of 18 and 25. They lived in special camps and did physical outdoor labor. In Louisiana, CCC workers did soil conservation work on farms and some road construction.

The CCC camps were located throughout the state. A photograph of the CCC camp in Pleasant Hill in DeSoto Parish shows us that the young men wore uniforms and lived in barracks. The buildings in the camp included a cafeteria and a library.

Another job program provided work for men with families. This was the **Works Progress Administration** (WPA). The men, who were paid about \$7 a week, built schools, courthouses, parks, and other public buildings.

The new airbase outside Shreveport, Barksdale Field, was also improved by a government work program. The base had been established in 1933 when 20,886 Bossier Parish acres were purchased for \$1.5 million. During the 1930s, the WPA paid cotton planters and farmers to grade, plow, harrow, and plant Bermuda grass on 1,400 acres of the base’s land to make it flat and green.

During the depression, President Roosevelt urged Congress to pass laws to bring economic recovery and relieve the suffering of the unemployed. One of the first New Deal programs was direct aid for the needy. Federal funds came to the state from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. For the first time, Louisiana had a statewide program to help the poor—the Unemployment Relief Committee.

Before the widespread suffering of the Great Depression brought federal help for the poor, the state had depended on local governments to care for the needy. The Poor Laws of 1880 and 1916 directed police juries to provide for the poor. Some parishes even maintained a poor house. Now too many people needed help for the local governments to handle.

The federal government also helped by giving groceries to those in need. This was called the *commodity program*. The groceries (commodities) often included coffee, butter, short-

Figure 28 New Deal Programs

Program	Date	Purpose
Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)	1933	Built dams on the Tennessee River to control flooding and generate electricity.
Public Works Administration (PWA)	1933	Put people to work building roads, buildings, and other public works projects.
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)	1933	Insured individual savings accounts so that people did not lose their money if banks failed or closed their doors.
Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA)	1933	Provided federal funds for state and community relief efforts.
Civil Works Administration (CWA)	1933	Provided temporary federal jobs for the unemployed.
Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)	1933	Provided jobs for young single men building forest trails and roads, planting trees to reforest the land and control flooding, and building parks.
Federal Housing Administration (FHA)	1934	Insured home loans for low-income families.
Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)	1934	Regulated stocks and gave stock information.
Social Security Administration (SSA)	1935	Created a system for retirement and unemployment insurance.
Works Progress Administration (WPA)	1935	Employed out-of-work Americans to repair roads, and build or repair bridges. Also employed writers, musicians, and artists who painted murals, wrote guidebooks, and provided public performances.
National Youth Administration (NYA)	1935	Provided job training and part-time work for college students.



Above: The Civilian Conservation Corps put thousands of unemployed young men to work on conservation projects.

Life in the rural South was greatly affected by the Roosevelt plan that brought electricity to farms and other rural areas. The Rural Electrification Administration (REA) paid the cost of extending power lines, which the early electric companies said were too expensive to build and maintain. In addition, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) paid farmers not to grow crops. With smaller harvests, crop prices were expected to rise.

The poverty of the depression years increased Louisiana's health problems.

Hunger brought more disease. Malnourished children risked diseases, such as pellagra, caused by a poor diet. Public health nurses worked to establish nutrition programs.

In 1937, Congress passed the National School Lunch Act to improve the diet of America's children. One of the new senators who supported this bill was Allen Ellender. He had been an ally of Huey Long in the Louisiana legislature.

Lagniappe

Barksdale Field was named for a World War I veteran, Lieutenant Eugene Hoy Barksdale of the Army Air Corps, who lost his life while flight testing an observation aircraft over McCook Field, in Dayton, Ohio, on August 11, 1926.



Lagniappe

President Roosevelt himself visited New Orleans in May 1937.

He served in the U.S. Senate from 1937 until 1972, when he died during his re-election campaign.

The morale of the people of Louisiana was boosted by a visit from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. When Mrs. Roosevelt came to Shreveport in March 1937, thousands of people stood on the

street to watch her pass. She gave two speeches: "A Typical Day at the White House" and "An Individual's Responsibility to His Community."

Above: This rare 1940 color photograph by Marion Post Wolcott shows Cajun children fishing in a bayou near Terrebonne, a Farm Security Administration project.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Why did people who lived in rural Louisiana cope with the depression better than people in cities?
2. What was the purpose of the New Deal programs?
3. What are two New Deal programs that provided work in Louisiana?