

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Human Cost of the Great Depression

### Part A. Migrant Farm Labor Experience

Directions: Analyze the photograph, read the documents and answer the questions that follow.



Farm Security Administration: farmers whose topsoil blew away joined the sod caravans of "Okies" on Route 66 to California, 1935.

After World War I, farmers were able to earn less for their crops than before the war. This was due to a decline in European demand for American food and a recession. In order to maintain their income, farmers began to produce more food. They thought that even if prices were lower, producing more would create the same amount of income. Unfortunately, this led to overproduction which lowered prices even further.

Overproduction created a series of challenges for farmers. First, farmers often mortgaged their farms in order to pay for equipment and seed to increase production. Already financially overextended, the stock market crash forced many into foreclosure. Farmers were forced to find other work at a time when the nation suffered from the highest unemployment rate in history. Second, massive overproduction strained the land to the breaking point. A seven-year drought that began in 1931 created huge dust storms throughout the mid-West. Farms literally dried up and blew away forcing the farmers to move – many to California. Competition for jobs was high. The result was depressed wages and poor living conditions. The onset of World War II and the availability of war-related jobs dramatically improved the lifestyle of migrant farmers.

1. Why did farm prices fall after World War I?
2. Why did farmers need to move during the Great Depression?
3. What event helped to improve the life of migrant farmers?

## Part B. Children's Experience

Directions: Analyze the photograph, read the documents and answer the questions that follow.



"But the inadequacy of state regulation of child labor is shown by such facts as these: nine states, through exemptions in their laws, still permit children *under* fourteen to work in industry during school hours; seven states permit children between fourteen and sixteen years of age to work nine to eleven hours a day; ten states allow children in this age group to work until 8 p.m. or later; thirty-two states have practically no regulation of the employment in hazardous occupations of sixteen and seventeen-year-old girls and boys."

(Amidon, Beulah, "Children Wanted," *Survey Graphic*, January, 1937, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 10.)

"A national poll by the American Institute of Public Opinion in May 1936 returned a six-to-four vote in favor of the regulation of child labor by Congress. In this poll, the child labor amendment carried every state except South Dakota, Kansas and Maryland. All ten of the largest cities in the country favored it. Even the southern states, presumably the stronghold of states' rights and of child labor, returned decisive majorities for the amendment. The four reasons most frequently cited by those voting "yes" were: 'Children under eighteen should all be in school, not out working. There's plenty of time for that later.' 'It will help solve unemployment by providing more jobs for older people who need work most.' 'We must protect our children. They can't stand shop work. It ruins their health.' 'Child labor is a national problem and Congress is most capable of handling it.'"

(Amidon, Beulah, "Children Wanted," *Survey Graphic*, January, 1937, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 10.)

"One of the many tragic aspects of the industrial exploitation of children is the army of boys and girls who, at the outset of their industrial careers, fall victims to the machine. Each year, in the sixteen states which take the trouble to find out what is happening to their young workers, no less than a thousand children under eighteen years are permanently disabled and another hundred are killed."

(Zimand, Gertrude Folks, "Children Hurt at Work," *The Survey*, July 1932, vol. 68, no. 8, p. 326.)

## Part B. Children's Experience

Directions: Read the documents and answer the questions that follow.

"According to figures of the Bureau of Industrial Relations, many of the children are attempting to support entire families on their meager earnings. 'Hours of labor in many of the Pennsylvania sweatshops range from fifty to ninety a week,' said Stephen Raushenbush, of the bureau, 'and the wages start at 50 cents and go to \$10. This deplorable condition is responsible for \$1.98 silk dresses, 3-for-10-cent cigars, 39-cent silk hosiery, \$10 suits and top coats, and 25 cent shirts and neckties.' More than half of the men's garment industry of the State operates on a sweatshop basis."

(French, Paul Comly, "Children on Strike," *The Nation*, May 31, 1933, vol. 136, no. 3543, p. 611.)

"It is interesting to analyze the sources of opposition to this (Child Labor) constitutional amendment permitting Congress to enact legislation protecting young workers. Some opponents sincerely believe that it is an invasion of states' rights, or that it deals with matters outside the proper sphere of government. But, as Mayor La Guardia of New York said at a child labor hearing in the 1935 legislature, "It is not the constitutionality of the amendment which is chiefly opposed; it is the economics of the amendment." The most determined opponents of ratification are those who profit from child labor, and those who, like the utility groups, fear a precedent for federal control."

(Amidon, Beulah, "Children Wanted," *Survey Graphic*, January, 1937, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 10.)

1. What evidence suggests that state regulations of child labor are inadequate during the Great Depression?
2. What are the four most popular reasons for restricting child labor?
3. A Constitutional Amendment restricting child labor was proposed to the states in April of 1924. The amendment states in part that "*The Congress shall have power to limit, regulate, and prohibit the labor of persons under eighteen years of age.*" The amendment failed to garner an approval from 75% of the states. Who are the "most determined opponents of ratification?"

## The Human Cost of the Great Depression

### Part C. African American Experience

Directions: Analyze the photograph, read the documents and answer the questions that follow.



"Negro jackhammer operator at the Tennessee Valley Authority Douglas Dam on the French Broad River" FDR Presidential Library.

"Over a half of the gainfully employed colored Americans are concentrated in domestic service and farming. The workers in these two pursuits are the most casual and unstable in the modern economic world. This follows from the fact that neither of them requires any great capital outlay to buy necessary equipment. Thus when there is a decline in trade ... the employer has every incentive to dismiss his workers; thus, these two classes are fired early in a depression."

(Weaver, Robert C., *The New Deal and the Negro: A Look at the Facts*, National Urban League, July 1935, vol 13, no 7, p.200)

"Anyone familiar with the facts will hardly deny that the rural Negro, deprived of effective political power and subjected to taxation and farm assessments by agents over whom he has no control or influence, can expect little relief from his own efforts so long as the local government is left in complete control of the situation."

(Foreman, Clark, *What hope for the rural negro?*, Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life, National Urban League, April, 1934, vol. 12, no. 4, p. 105.)

## Part C. African American Experience

Directions: Read the documents and answer the questions that follow.

"Moreover, it is impossible to have national recovery as long as one-ninth of the nation's workers are not given the opportunity to recover. If high wages are essential to an improved economic and social state, then recovery of business and public welfare is retarded to the extent that low wages are permitted. In leaving agricultural and domestic workers out of the code formula, the bulk of Negro workers, some 3,000,000 out of a total of 5,500,000, will continue to live under a system which is little better than slavery. Wages now for domestic workers in the South are down to as low as \$1.50 per week, and three dollars a week is regarded as a good wage. Are we to have a New Deal for whites and an old deal for Negroes? The United States cannot possibly remain an international arbiter if it continues to neglect to arbitrate its own domestic affairs."

(Hill, T. Arnold, *An Emergency is On!* Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life, National Urban League, September, 1933, vol. 11, No. 9, p. 280.)

"In 1930 the Census showed 6,697,230 or 56.5 per cent of the Negro population to be rural. Of that 4,690,523, or 39.3 per cent of the entire Negro population, were classified as rural-farm population. Of this number 1,987,839 or 46 per cent of the total number of Negroes over 10 years of age were gainfully employed in Agriculture; 182,018 Negroes owned and operated farms and 700,911 were tenants, 923 were managers and 1,112,510 were farm laborers of one sort or another."

(Foreman, Clark, *What hope for the rural negro?*, Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life, National Urban League, April, 1934, vol. 12, no. 4, p. 105.)

1. Over 50% of African Americans worked in what fields during the Great Depression?
2. According to the 1930 census, where did most African Americans live?
3. Why is the economic future of African Americans in jeopardy "so long as the local government is left in complete control of the situation?"