

Face-to-Face with the Great Depression Whose History Is It Anyway?: Patterns in History

Grade level: Middle School through high school

Estimated time: Eight class periods

Specific topic: The Great Depression

Subtopic: Debate

Teacher background information

Using evidence from primary sources and a simple debate format, students will be asked to present positions concerning the lessons of Great Depression–era history. Before beginning this lesson, students should have a general knowledge about the Great Depression era and a working knowledge of debate and debate procedures.

This lesson is best used in conjunction with Studs Terkel’s website, *Studs Terkel: Conversations with America* at www.studsterkel.org. Although optional, it is also a good idea to have copies of Terkel’s books *Hard Times* and *Working* available for student use in your classroom.

Key concepts

Arduous times result in “national conversations” in the media and the political arena, within organizations and institutions, and among friends and family. Today we continue to debate, discuss, and evaluate the causes, lasting effects, remedies, and legacy of the Great Depression

Key questions

1. Do historic patterns from the Depression repeat themselves today?
2. What current events are hotly debated? What opposing viewpoints are expressed?
3. What conditions produce scapegoats? Are scapegoats the product of historical cause-effect thinking gone awry?

Goal of this lesson

To enhance students’ abilities to analyze, synthesize, and debate information and data about the Great Depression through the reading of primary source material.

Objectives

This lesson aims to help students:

1. Strengthen their research skills.
2. Understand the value of primary sources.
3. Apply their critical thinking and listening skills.
4. Gain formal debate experience.
5. See opposing views reasonably.
6. Identify fallacious reasoning.

Materials

Master copies of the “Biography of Studs Terkel” and applicable interview transcripts are provided.

1. Biography of Studs Terkel
2. Excerpt from transcripts of Studs Terkel’s interviews with John Beecher, Dorothe Bernstein, Buddy Blankenship, Cesar Chavez, Kitty McCullough, Mary Osley and her daughter Peggy Terry, Ed Paulsen, and Jose Yglesias. If your students have access to the Internet, they may also complete this lesson by listening to the audio files on Studs Terkel’s website at www.studsterkel.org.

For more *History Lab* activities, visit the educators section of the Chicago Historical Society’s website.

Procedures

1. Review and discuss debate techniques and format (see step 5 for format) and rehearse debate structure using an unrelated issue of your choice. Suggested points about a debate to share with your students:
 - a. Listen carefully to what your opponent says and take notes on the points he or she makes.
 - b. Avoid personal attacks by referring to ideas rather than the person expressing the ideas.
 - c. Be courteous when speaking of your opponent, referring to him or her as “my opponent.”
 - d. Address the audience (or the judge), not your opponent.
 - e. Watch the time so that you can begin a good conclusion twenty to thirty seconds before your time is up.
 - f. Be aware of fallacious reasoning—hasty generalizations, false cause, etc. If your opponent uses fallacious reasoning, point it out to the judge.
 - g. Stay cool, and don’t become emotional.When students are comfortable with the debate environment, move forward with the Great Depression assignment.

2. Write a proposition, of your choice, about the Great Depression era. For example, “People and organizations will generally adjust behavior for current and future success by learning from the mistakes of the past.” Divide students into groups of four and assign two students to the “affirmative” position and two students to the “negative” position on the proposition. All groups can work on researching and debating the same proposition, or you can write several propositions and have each group debate a different topic.
3. Students should find evidence supporting their respective positions from the eight Studs Terkel interviews (if students are not already familiar with Studs Terkel and his work use the provided biography as an introduction) and any other resources you supply or the students locate. Allow enough in-class or homework time for students to research and meet in their affirmative and negative pairings. During this phase, students should prepare their cases for the debates by writing their argument in outline form. Encourage students to rehearse their opening statement and potential rebuttals to make sure they fill the allotted time (format and time limits are listed under step 5).
4. Following their research, students assigned the affirmative position will support the proposition by issuing two contentions (or reasons why the statement is true). An example of an affirmative contention is: “Because of their experience during the depression, people tend to rely less on credit to purchase goods and services.” Students assigned the negative position will also oppose the proposition by issuing two contentions (or reasons why the statement is not true). An example of a negative contention is: “Those who were jobless during the depression continued to be jobless in the following years, living off handouts and charity.”
5. After students have completed their research, written their outlines, and composed their contentions, hold the debates. Each debate will consist of a group of four students, two students arguing the affirmative and two the negative, about their assigned proposition. Review the following format with students before holding the debate:
 - a. Affirmative speaks first (student #1). He or she restates the proposition (“People and organizations will generally adjust behavior for current and future success by learning from the mistakes of the past”) and issues the two affirmative contentions, citing specific evidence for each. (5 minutes)

- b. Negative follows (student #2). He or she rejects the proposition (“Generally people and organizations do not learn from the mistakes of the past to adjust behavior for current and future success”) and issues two negative contentions, citing specific evidence for each. The negative also takes two additional minutes to refute the affirmative contentions by giving reasons why the contentions are not valid or do not support the affirmative position. (7 minutes)
- c. Affirmative follows with a rebuttal (student #3). He or she defends his or her position by reaffirming the proposition, reviewing his or her contentions, addressing the points made by the negative, and refuting the negative contentions. (5 minutes)
- d. Negative concludes with a rebuttal (student #4), summarizing his or her points and responding to the affirmative rebuttal. (3 minutes)
- e. Use time cards to indicate to presenters how much time is left—5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and one-half minutes, and “Stop.”

Educator note: Simplify or enhance this structure as appropriate for your students.

6. Conclude by facilitating a class discussion about the debate content—the proposition(s) you used—and student reaction to the debate experience.

Suggestions for student assessment

Before holding the debates, distribute an assessment form, including the following points.

All points should be rated on a scale of one to five, with five being the highest.

1. Presentation: Was the speaker well organized, clear, and precise?
2. Evidence: Did the speaker use quality evidence to support his or her case?
3. Effectiveness: Was the speaker’s rebuttal to his or her opponent’s position effective?
4. Listening and note-taking skills: Did the speaker demonstrate these skills during his or her opponent’s speech.
5. Use of time: Did the speaker use his or her time effectively?

Determine the winning position (affirmative or negative team) by calculating the points earned by each side.

Extension activities

1. Hold a “debate-off” between the “winners” of different classes.
2. Ask students to watch and respond critically to a political television program where opposing positions are presented. Provide students with a list of programs from which to choose and assign the project as homework or play taped excerpts in class. Require that students evaluate the show in writing or ask them to present their evaluation in an oral presentation; in either case, students should cite portions of the broadcast. Devise a written response or oral presentation rubric to share with students before they begin the assignment.

Additional resources

1. Visit the Debate Central website at <http://debate.uvm.edu/> for more debate activities and ideas.
2. Ask your school’s debate teacher or speech coach to visit your class.

3. Show portions of taped debate-style news programs, current political debates, or famous debates (such as the Nixon-Kennedy presidential debate) in class to help students learn debate format and techniques. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the debaters and the techniques they used to make their points.

This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

English Language Arts

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

Social Science

State Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

State Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

***History Lab* is made possible through a generous grant from the Polk Bros. Foundation.**

These materials were written and researched by Ronald Solberg. Images used in this lesson are from the Chicago Historical Society's collection. *History Lab* coordinated by Heidi Moisan of the Chicago Historical Society.

The Chicago Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the Chicago Park District's generous support of all of the Historical Society's activities.

BIOGRAPHY OF STUDS TERKEL



Studs Terkel. Photograph by Tom Maday.

Studs Terkel, radio broadcast personality and prize-winning author, was born Louis Terkel in New York, New York, on May 16, 1912. His father Samuel was a tailor and his mother Anna Finkel was a seamstress. He had three brothers. The family moved to Chicago in 1922 and opened a rooming house at Ashland Avenue and Flournoy Street on the Near West Side.

From 1926 to 1936, the family ran the Wells-Grand Hotel, another rooming house at Wells Street and Grand Avenue. Terkel credits his knowledge of the world to the tenants who gathered in the lobby of the hotel and the people who congregated in nearby Bughouse Square, a meeting place for workers, labor organizers, dissidents, the unemployed, and religious fanatics of many persuasions. In 1939, he married Ida Goldberg, and they had one son.

After graduating from University of Chicago's law school in 1934, Terkel pursued acting and appeared on stage, on the radio, and in the movies. He has been a playwright, a radio news commentator, a sportscaster, a film narrator, a jazz columnist, a disc jockey, and a music festival host. In 1944, he began hosting a radio show. Radio allowed him to express his own personality and to play the music he enjoyed, including folk, opera, jazz, and blues. In 1945, he debuted

his own television series, called "Stud's Place," in which he began asking people the types of questions that would mark his interview style in later years.

On "The Studs Terkel Program," which was heard on Chicago's fine arts radio station WFMT from 1952 to 1997, Terkel interviewed national and international figures who helped shape the past century. The program included guests who were politicians, writers, activists, labor organizers, performing artists, and architects. Terkel's depth of personal knowledge of the diverse subjects he explored on his program is remarkable, as is his ability to get others to do what they do best—talk about themselves. Many of the interviews he conducted for his books and for his radio program are featured on his website at www.studsterkel.org.

Terkel's first book of oral history interviews was *Division Street: America*, published in 1966. In subsequent years, he wrote many oral history books covering topics such as the Great Depression, World War II, race relations, working, and aging. Terkel continues to write, interview people, work on his books, and speak in public. He is currently Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence at the Chicago Historical Society.

Excerpt from transcript of Studs Terkel's interview with John Beecher

John Beecher: My father was a top executive of a southern subsidiary of the United States Steel Corporation. Fortunately for me and possibly fortunately for him, he lost most of his money in the stock market crash of '29. He had a hard time recovering from it, psychologically.

I remember how, after dinner, he'd just lie on the couch in utter despair, night after night, for hours. A man who was interested in music, read all kinds of literature . . . there was this man so knocked out. We were afraid he was going to commit suicide. His close personal friend did take a header out of the fourteenth story window. He was still getting an excellent salary, but he felt—up to that time—the measure of a man's success was the amount of money he accumulated.

But he did recover. He became a kind of coolly critical intelligence. He was ready for any kind of change in the system—perhaps this system was not eternal, perhaps there should be a more cooperative society.

I had my first job in the steel mills, back in the Twenties. You could say the depression commenced in this town, Ainsley, Alabama, a steel mill suburb of Birmingham. We had the first bank to go bust in the early days of the depression. All the workingmen trusted the banker. I remember an old group of Italians, who had been brought over from Italy in the 1890s to work in this mill. They, like the blacks and poor whites, were kept at common labor all their lives and were never allowed to rise. Yet they trusted this banker with their life savings, which were swept away in that bank crash.

In '32 the plant was shut down and stayed shut for years. It became a ghost town, never quite recovered. The big plant which had employed 6,000 men when I worked there in the Twenties today employs possibly a thousand.

For eight years, starting in '34, I worked as a field-administrator [New Deal administrator] all over the South . . . with white and black, rural people, coal miners, steel workers, textile workers, fertilizer plant people, turpentine camp workers and sharecroppers.

Studs Terkel: Was theirs an attitude of resignation?

John Beecher: No, indeed . . . the people were ready, really, to take action. They, of course, didn't know which way to turn. Few people believed, in '32, that Roosevelt was going to be the answer. . . . Roosevelt surprised everyone by coming up with emergency programs which did take most of the bite out of popular discontent.

I remember in Ainsley that year, in the relief headquarters, a woman had been arguing and arguing to get some milk for her baby. You should have seen the things they were giving babies instead of milk. I remember seeing them put salt-pork gravy in milk bottles and putting a nipple on, and the baby sucking this salt-pork gravy. A real blue baby, dying of starvation. In house after house, I saw that sort of thing.

Well, this woman was determined to get real milk for her baby. She raised all the Cain she could, until the top supervisor agreed to let her have a quart. When they handed it to her, she got back as far as she could and threw it up against the wall—Pow!—and smashed it. This was the kind of spirit, you see . . .

Excerpt from transcript of Studs Terkel's interview with Dorothe Bernstein

Dorothe Bernstein: We didn't have fear because we were young and because of the Depression . . . nobody was really your enemy. These were guys who didn't work; who didn't have work. And they would probably ride the railroad. I don't know how they got where they were going or where they ended up or that. But I remember on Fridays we used to give them our lunch—all of us . . . there might have been 125 of us going off to Harrison High School carrying the same brown paper bag with mashed sardine sandwiches and mayonnaise on it . . . As I say, I was underprivileged, I was raised in a home [orphanage]. But I was very, very privileged because I had everything that a person needs to live with.

Studs Terkel: From this home, you and your friends would give sandwiches to these guys?

Dorothe Bernstein: Right. But these were—they were nice men. You would never think they would do you bodily harm. They weren't what you call hoboes or bums or that. These were hard luck guys. . . . They would stay along the park, especially along this railroad track, whatever the railroad that goes somewhere along Twenty-second and Kedzie, or some place along the park there.

I went to school with kids that were not in the home, but the ones who lived with their parents. A lot of them had it real, real rough. They would live in one place for a couple of months, as long as they were able to pay the rent. Then, the next month you'd go visit the same girlfriend in a different address. Two, three months later you'd find them at a different address, but in the same locale. It's just that—I don't know . . . you . . . it's hard to say, Studs. People today, or kids today, when they talk about the good old times, I don't know if it's sentimentality. These can't be good old times when men want to work and couldn't find work. When your family or your kids wanted milk and that and you had to go scratch for it. And there was really no place . . . family life was different, too. I don't think there was any relative anywhere, I don't care what your status, that didn't have somebody who was out of a job or hadn't been put out of their apartment because they couldn't pay the rent; that didn't have somebody sleeping on a folding bed or on a couch.

. . . The kids today can't imagine when there's so much, when even with wars and poverties or whatever—it was nothing like that period.

I remember one girlfriend I went to the store with, and she was real ashamed because they had something like food stamps must be today, and you would go to the grocery and you would give them that. And I remember how apologetic she was to me. It kind of embarrassed her. She said, You want to wait outside? And I remember going in with her and she said, well, we have these. I don't have money, but I give this to the grocer and you get your food in exchange. I guess the government must have taken care of x number of dollars or whatever it was. It was, as I say, for people it was rough sledding.

Douglas Park, at that time I remember we used to go ice-skating and we went boating in the summertime. I mean, you didn't have money to do things with, you did what . . . you made treasure hunts, you went looking for old things through the park and that . . . a lot of the stores and bakery shops would have day-old or maybe two-day-old [bread]. The older, the cheaper it became. I had one girlfriend I went to school with, her mother would make a terrific bread pudding out of this stuff . . . and this was a real treat. With a few raisins, but lots and lots of bread, lots of stale bread went into it.

[I'd] work six days to support a family, and if I couldn't cut it on six days, I'd work the seventh. You want for your kids, you want them to the little bit better than you didn't have . . . But you say to a kid . . . I mean any parent if they would say to a kid: well, when I was young, you didn't have this. Who asked for a dollar? You took back pop bottles and went around looking for milk bottles that you got two cents for. And if you saved enough of it maybe you were lucky enough on a Saturday afternoon to go to the movies. And if you tell this to a kid, they would say: well, I mean, it would be like unbelievable. Like I wonder if in their mind it would flash: oh they must be dramatizing it, it couldn't possibly be like that . . . Of course the way I feel, kids shouldn't know from these things. I mean, if they're hungry there should be stuff for them to eat.

Excerpt from transcript of Studs Terkel's interview with Buddy Blankenship

Buddy Blankenship: All my people, why they was for Hoover. Hoover brung the panic on, but they didn't blame Hoover. . . . They wouldn't believe you, 'cause they liked him. When Roosevelt got in, they didn't know what to think. Everything changed. [That's] when my dad changed. . . . there came a man askin' how much his disability was—my dad was a World War I veteran—and he told 'em how much he was gettin' and the man said that ain't enough. And then come a big check, six hundred and some odd dollars. It done us pretty good. It changed dad over right there. [That] was the most time I ever seen dad that tickled.

I was about fifteen years old and I had about fourteen miles to walk to school. Children are funny about walking to school. They think it's not worth it. It was worth it though if he'd realized his manhood would've been a whole lot better if he had walked twenty miles. I told my dad I wasn't going to school any more. He said, Why, you just come on and go work with me. I went in the mines and I went to work. From '30 to about the last of '32. The Depression got so bad, we went to farming, raising our own stuff. He worked in the mines fifty-one years.

We lived eight miles from the mine and we had to ride it horseback. I was riding behind my dad. Many times I'd have to git off and hammer his feet out of the stirrups. They'd be froze in the stirrups. It was cold you know. When you come out of the mines, your feet would be wet of sweat and wet where you're walking on the bottom. And get up on those steel stirrups, while you're riding by eight miles, your feet'd be froze and you couldn't git 'em out of the stirrups. I'd have to hammer 'em out. His feet were numb and they wouldn't hurt till they started to get warm and then they would get to hurtin'.

We got up at five in the mornin', start at six. We got out at ten that night. We'd work about sixteen hours a day, seventeen hours. The boss said we had to clean up. We didn't clean it up, the next

morning there'd be another man in the mine to clean it up. The motorman would say: How many cars you got? Five more. Well, hurry it up, we want to get out of here. They was getting' a dollar seventy-five a day. We'd get sixty to sixty five ton a day, that is, both of us, me and dad. Then they changed me off and let me get a dollar and a half a day. I was trappin'. . . . The trap door was shut so the air would circulate through the mine. . . . Of course, we had to got to work. We didn't eat if we didn't go.

About '32, it got so they wouldn't let us work but two days a week. We saved twenty dollars in the office. They laid us off two weeks till we traded that twenty dollars in the store. We had to trade it out in the store or we didn't get to work no more. It was a company store. What we made, we had to go next evening and trade it off. If we didn't they'd lay us off. They didn't let you draw no money at all. It was scrip. They had a man on top of the hill who took your tonnage down, how many tons you loaded, and it was sent up to the scrip office. If you made twenty over your expenses, for house, rent, lights and all, why then they laid you off till you spent that twenty dollars.

I worked about two years on the mines, then we went back to the farm from '32 to '37. . . . The works was bad, but you didn't have to pay some big price for the stuff. You raised your own hogs, you could have your own cattle. And you had your own meat, your own bacon, [and] lard. You didn't have to buy nothin' but flour and meal. You raised your own potatoes. You never had money because you didn't make it to have it. It was a pretty bad time. It seemed just like a dream to me, the Depression did. I was young and didn't pay no attention to it. . . . I'd rather be back on the farm than anything I ever done.

Excerpt from transcript of Studs Terkel's interview with Cesar Chavez

Cesar Chavez: [I have] some memories of the early '30s, some very vivid, others hazy but-it's funny but those that are more vivid are those that were most hard on us and most of 'em were-oh I remember such things as having to move out of our house, and my father brought in a team of horses and a wagon and we had always lived in that house and we couldn't understand why we were moving out. And I tried to ask him why and he told me well, we're moving to another house. To me that wasn't enough of an explanation, because why should we be moving to another house? I remember that very vividly. Mostly because when we got to the other house it was a worst house, it was a poor house.

This was in Yuma, Arizona, . . . well, it turned out later, my Dad was being turned out of his small plot of land that he had inherited from his father who previous to that had homesteaded it. Then I also saw my [uncles] who had property near my father also moving out. . . . several months later we had to move out of the other place that we went to and also for the same reason. . . . the bank had foreclosed on the loan. Well, it so happened that the president of the bank was the guy who most wanted our land . . . because he owned land all around us. And so that became very valuable, although a small piece of land, very valuable.

And then, so I recollect we all of us climbed into an old Chevy that my dad had. And then the next recollection we were in California and migratory workers. Somewhere during that period, I remember a man coming with my dad to school and we were asked to leave the room, to go outside. And we went outside under the tree and he began to interview my dad and all of us. And we were barefooted, going to school without shoes, and I remember it was during the winter and it was cold. . . . and it was such an event, it was something different. Anyway, he gave my father some forms and then we went to Yuma . . . he took this paper to one of the stores we went to, and we got shoes and sweaters.

Studs Terkel: So you said then that you piled into the Chevy? How many were there in your family?

Cesar Chavez: There were five kids, a small family by those standards. . . . [When we went to California] I was about eight, but I remember very well some of those things. And well, it was a strange life. Cause we had been poor, [but] we knew every night that there was a bed there and that this was our room. There was a kitchen, and well, it was sort of a settled life, you know, and we had chickens and hogs, eggs and all these things . . . But all of a sudden [it] changed and, well, when [you're] small, you can't figure these things out. But you know that something's not right and you don't like it, but you don't question it and you don't let that get you down . . . But I remember that this must have had quite an impact on, especially my father. Because he had been used to owning the land and all of a sudden . . .

Excerpt from transcript of Studs Terkel's interview with Kitty McCulloch

Kitty McCulloch: [The Great Depression] meant a lot of heartaches. But I think, truthfully, we were happier then than we are now. I'm a nurse—which was very fortunate for me. Cause when the depression came along instead of having to call a doctor, I did the work that should have been done. I had one little girl. She was six years old, and then the crash came. We were living very nicely on Washington Boulevard, and we had our little savings in the bank.

There were many beggars, who would come to your back door, and they would say they were hungry. I wouldn't give them money because I didn't have it. But I did take them in and put them in my kitchen and give them something to eat.

This one man came in—it was right before Christmas. My husband had a very nice suit, tailored. It was a black suit with a fine white pin-stripe in it. He put it to one side. I thought he didn't like the suit. I said to this man, "Your clothes are all ragged. I think I have a nice suit for you." So I gave him this suit.

The following Sunday, my husband was to go to a wake. He said, "Where's my good suit?" And I said, "Well, Daddy, you never wore it. I—well, it's gone." He said, "Where is it gone to?" I said, "I gave it to a man who had such shabby clothes. Anyway, you got three other suits and he didn't have any. So I gave it to him." He said, "You're the limit, Mother."

One elderly man that had white whiskers and all, he came to my back door. He was pretty much of a philosopher. He was just charming. A man probably in his sixties. And he did look like St. Nicholas, I'll tell you that. I gave him a good, warm meal. He said, "Bring me a pencil and paper and I'll draw you a picture." So he sketched. And he was really good. He was an artist.

[Laughing] A man came to my door and I could smell the liquor a little. He said, "You don't suppose you could have a couple of shirts you could give me, old shirts of your husband's?" I said, "Oh, I'm so very sorry, my husband hasn't anything but old shirts, really. That's all he has right now and he wears those." He said, "Lady, if I get some extra ones, I'll come back and give them to you." I said, "Go on, mind your own business."

And another one, I smelled liquor on *his* breath, too. He wanted to know if he could have a few pennies. I said, "Are you hungry?" He said, "I haven't any food. I'd like some money to buy some food." I said, "I'll make you a nice sandwich." So I made him a sandwich with mayonnaise and chicken and lettuce, a double sandwich, put it in wax paper. He gave me a dirty look and he started down the alley. I watched him when he got, oh, two or three doors down, he threw it down on the street.

Money doesn't mean anything to them [young people] now. You're just . . . even a parent doesn't mean anything to a child if they haven't quite a lot to offer. . . . Well, when I didn't have very much and my little daughter was growing, and I tried to make her unselfish. That was one thing I expounded on . . .

Excerpt from transcript of Studs Terkel's interview with Mary Owsley and her daughter Peggy Terry

Mary Owsley: We went back to Oklahoma the last time in January of 1929, and I had three children born there in Oklahoma City, and there we lived 'til 1936, through the dust bowl period. And the depression. Which we felt very much because [my husband] had worked in the oil fields there. . . . But then the depression came and the oil fields begin to lay off the last men they hired, and he was without a job. And he was working on WPA for \$8 a month. And the Red Cross had to help us, of course. . . . Anybody that's out of work that's got a family to support that's worth their salt, they're always looking for work. They're always looking for the work, but they don't always find it. And it's not always their fault that they don't find it . . . And when they laid him off in '32 that was the beginning for us. We had nothing to live on.

Well, the fact was that there was no work to be had, and there was thousands of people out of work in Oklahoma city. And they set up a soup line, and the food was clean and it was delicious. You had to go get it, which was alright, but we participated in that, believe me. And had to. And many, many, more people-colored and white-and I didn't see any difference. . . . And that went on then until-well, there was many people that went completely broke. Lost their homes, their bank accounts and everything they had, that they had accumulated from their young days. Real wealthy people even lost everything they had. And these are facts.

Well, then [my husband] worked little odd jobs, anything he could pick up to do. And then the Red Cross helped us. And outside of that we just absolutely lived on a very, very poverty-stricken life. And we wasn't alone. There was many, many people like that . . . Well, we had just the very commonest of foods, of course. I was raised a hill-billy, and I know how-a lot of people says I can go into the kitchen and make a meal out of nothin'. So we just lived on beans and potatoes and corn-bread and gingerbread and whatever we could git like that. The very cheapest of food. We had to.

Oh, [the dust storms] were terrible. And you could hang clothes, wash and hang clothes on a line, and if you happened to be away from the house and

couldn't get those clothes in before that storm got there, you'd never wash that out. Oil was in that sand, and it'd color 'em the most awful color you ever saw. It just ruined 'em. They was just never fit for use, actually. I had to use 'em, understand. But they wasn't very presentable . . . We lived in a good house. It wasn't a brick house, but it wouldn't a made any difference if it had been a brick house. But these storms, when they would hit, you had to clean house from the attic to the ground. Everything was covered in sand. And I thought that was just the poor people. But that's not true. All them wealthy people, when the sandstorms hit, had to have their house cleaned from the attic to the cellar.

The majority of the people were hit and hit hard. But they were mentally disturbed you're bound to know, cause they didn't know when the end of all this was comin'. And people were very depressed. There [were] a lot of suicides that I know of . . . they couldn't see any hope for a better tomorrow. And a lot of people committed suicide that I know of. I absolutely knew some who did.

I really do think that the depression brought people closer together. I really do think that. Because a lot of times one family would have some food. Somebody else maybe give it to 'em. They would divide. And that's just one instance of working together. And everybody that possibly could had a garden, and they even had community gardens where everybody would go in and work in these gardens and then everybody would go in and can the food and take care of it. And then everyone would share.

Peggy Terry: I first noticed the difference when we'd come home from school in the evening. My mother'd send us to the soup line. And we were never allowed to cuss. If you happened to be one of the first ones in line, you didn't get anything but water that was on top. So we'd ask the guy that was ladling out soup into the buckets—everybody had to bring their own bucket to get the soup—he'd dip the greasy, watery stuff off the top. So we'd ask him to please dip down to get some meat and potatoes from the bottom of the kettle. But he wouldn't do it. So we learned to cuss.

Excerpt from transcript of Studs Terkel's interview with Ed Paulsen

Ed Paulsen: I don't feel [the Great Depression] . . . We didn't get it that way. I was a country kid, small town kid in the west. My father was . . . an itinerant preacher. I never had any money, and therefore it kind of sneaked up on us. I just finished high school in 1930 and I walked out into this thing. And it wasn't a great absence of money, it was just things I'd been doin' since I was 14 . . . job-hunting, looking for a chance to earn a little money and buy some clothes. Because we had to be pretty self-supporting from 14 on, you bought your clothes. And all of a sudden it got tougher and tougher to do. And when I started to work at 14, I was good for \$4 a day. By 1931 you were working for a dollar a day, and in 1933 I was working for \$10 a month as a cowpuncher [in South Dakota].

When the depression hit, we were on the west coast, in the state in Washington. Then when I graduated from high school I drifted down to California. And that was tough. I mean, you can't imagine, there just wasn't anything to do. . . . I would be 18 that fall. Left my family and drifted down there, and first went to San Francisco. I tried to get a job on the docks, you know. I thought I was a big husky athlete, played football and basketball in high school. I thought, you know, this was a good place to look for work. I didn't have a college degree and already by that time if you were looking for a job at a Standard Oil Service Station you had to have a degree, you know, it was that kind of a market. But I thought I was big and strong and I'd get a job. But there just wasn't any work.

I headed back east, where I had a brother working on a railroad bridge gang. This is still 1930. And I drifted back and I got a job on a gravel crew road gang. And then drifted up to another part of South Dakota and got a job in harvest. And then my brother and I decided we'd go east, and as we went east it got tougher. We didn't understand the depression, nobody understood it.

It [the east] was different to us. We were westerners and we didn't know how to make out in the city and I know we went to Minneapolis, went to Chicago, [and] went as far east as Pittsburgh. And by this time it was terrifying. Because there were great queues of guys in soup lines. We didn't know how to join a soup line. We couldn't believe we had to, in the first place you know, we didn't see ourselves that way. We were . . . we had middle class ideas [laughs] without middle class income. And so we decided this is too tough and we started back. And I remember we came back to Minnesota, back up through the Dakotas, and back up to Washington State and that fall I picked apples . . . And then we went into the winter and there was no money up around the small towns and so we headed for California again. California was always a Mecca for us . . .

Well, I had three or four brothers, and we were all doing the same kind of thing. Sometimes there was one and sometimes there was three of us. That winter three of us ended up in San Francisco again, and by this time-this is 1931-there's no relief programs, but just thousands of men out . . . And I'd get up at five o'clock in the morning . . . and street car fare was a nickel in those days. And I'd head for the waterfront looking for work. And you'd go down to Third and Twenty-third down to Spreckles Sugar Refinery and American Can Company and all, and there would be outside the gates there would be a thousand men. And you know dang well when you go there there's only three or four jobs. The guy would come out . . . and he'd say I need two guys . . . A thousand men would fight like a pack of Alaskan dogs to get through there.

Excerpt from transcript of Studs Terkel's interview with Jose Yglesias

Jose Yglesias: In the sunlit town [Ybor City, a district of Tampa], the depression came imperceptibly. The realization came to me when Aunt Lila said there's no food in the house. My aunt who owned the house we lived in would no longer charge rent. It would be shameful to charge rent with \$9 a week coming in.

The grocery man would come by and take a little order, which he would bring the next day. When my mother would not order anything because she owed, he'd insist, "Why are you cutting down on beans?"

There was a certain difference between the depression in my hometown than elsewhere. . . . The streets were not like a city ghetto. There were poor houses, that hadn't been painted in years. But it was out in the open. You played in the sunlight. I don't remember real deprivation.

The depression began in 1930, with seasonal unemployment. Factories would close down before Christmas, after having worked very hard to fill orders throughout late summer and fall. Only the cheaper grade cigars would be made. They cut off the more expensive type.

My uncle was a foreman [in the cigar factory]. He was ill equipped for the job because he couldn't bear to fire anybody. He would discuss it with his wife, "We have to cut off so many people. What am I going to do?" My aunt would say, "You can't fire him." They have twelve children. You'd hear a great deal of talk. You knew things were getting worse. No more apprentices were taken in. My sister was in the last batch.

People began to go off to New York to look for jobs. Almost all my family were in New York by 1937. You'd take that bus far to New York. There we all stayed together. The only place people didn't sleep in was the kitchen. A bed was even in the foyer. People would show up from Tampa, and you'd put them up. We were the Puerto Rican immigrants of that time. In any cafeteria, in the

kitchen, the bus boys, [and] the dishwashers—you were bound to find at least two from Ybor City.

Some would drift back as jobs would open up again in Tampa. Some went on the WPA. People would put off governmental aid as long as possible. Aunt Lila and her husband were the first in our family, and the last, to go on WPA. This was considered a terrible tragedy, because it was a charity. You did not mention it to them.

That didn't mean you didn't accept another thing. There was no payday in any cigar factory that there wasn't a collection for anyone in trouble. If a father died, there was a collection for the funeral. When my father went to Havana for an operation there was a collection. That was all right. You yourself didn't ask. Some one said, "Listen, so and so's in trouble." . . . Neighbors have always helped one another. The community has always been that way. There was a solidarity. There was just something very nice . . .

My family thought very highly of Roosevelt, except my grandfather. . . . He'd say, "We learned to eat stones and survived on it." He'd say, "Hoover was just a mean old skinflint, and Roosevelt is just another Mussolini." But the New Deal did become the basis of a new union drive. And people did find jobs. . . .

HISTORY LAB | FEEDBACK FORM

Please take a few minutes to give us your History Lab feedback!

After reviewing and using this History Lab lesson, please send us your feedback. Your ideas and honest assessment will ensure that these lessons keep improving and provide us with useful insight for future teacher fellows.

First name: _____ Last name: _____

School: _____

Grade you teach: _____ E-mail: _____

Are you a CHS member? (circle one): yes no

Name of unit you are evaluating (check one):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> America's Documents of Freedom | <input type="checkbox"/> Chicago's World's Fairs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American Life in the Nineteenth Century | <input type="checkbox"/> Face to Face with the Great Depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The Civil War: Up Close and Personal | <input type="checkbox"/> America and Protest |

Name of lesson you are evaluating: _____

Evaluation questions:

1. On a scale of one to five (with five being the best) rate this lesson in terms of the quality of the student learning experience it provides (circle one):

5 4 3 2 1

2. What were the strengths of this lesson? _____

3. What aspects of this lesson needed additional fine-tuning? _____

4. Would you use this lesson, or some variation of it, again? Why or why not? _____

5. What advice, tips, or suggestions would you give to future users of this lesson? _____

6. Where does this lesson fit in your course of study (scope, sequence, unit)? _____

7. If applicable, how did the use of primary sources impact student learning? _____

8. Additional comments? (Use other side if necessary.) _____

Thank you for your time. Please send the completed form via mail or fax to: Chicago Historical Society, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois, 60614-6071, Attn: History Programs **Fax: 312-799-2452**



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