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### The Depression & New Deal: Gender & Racial Disparities

The Great Depression was a huge blow to the United States and as difficult as it is to admit, white Americans did not experience even half of what racial minorities, including Asian Americans, Hispanics, African Americans, and American Indians had to endure. At that time – 1933, the unemployment rate in the U.S. was in excess of 25%. The unemployment rate for minorities was 50%. Racial discrimination had hit astronomical heights in the 1920s to the 1930s and sadly enough, it was beyond the ability of minorities to comprehend the difference between “normal economic times” and the Great Depression. However, a greater number of minorities were blessed with too much economic impunity that they had to see indeed the Great Depression took everything from them. On the other side of the road, European Americans were still enjoying some economic privileges. The housing sector was tremendously punished as mortgage servicing and loan settlement became a major challenge. Needless to reiterate, whites were not as miserable as blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans (“To what extent did minorities receive a New Deal in the 1930s?”).

The Great Depression had many undesirable aspects including job loss. Unfortunately for blacks, they were the last to be hired and the first to be fired. Blacks were not offered jobs in public works, farms, or small businesses. There were some jobs reserved for the needy but black were never in the picture. Women were also at the receiving end of the depression. Black and women from other minority ethnicities were also excluded from employment programs. It is comprehensible that all women suffered, but black, Asian American, Mexican American, and Indian American women were put to a sharper sword (“To what extent did minorities receive a New Deal in the 1930s?”).

Women from the minority groups were occasionally sent back from or threatened at relief centers when applying for jobs or help. The food and clothing preserved for the needy were not given to women and men from the minority. The depression was as brutal as it could get (“To what extent did minorities receive a New Deal in the 1930s?”).

The increase of violence against minorities was another result of the depression. White men and women were competing for food, water and other resources with minority men and women. Employment battles intensified at the expense of women, specifically from the minority races. Sadly, minorities were disallowed to join unions and unions compromised Congress to remove from the New Deal the policies and laws that condemned discrimination. This prevented the New Deal from accomplishing its mandate of protecting the minorities from discrimination in employment, healthcare, education and other institutions (“To what extent did minorities receive a New Deal in the 1930s?”).

The Great Depression reached climax during Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s administration (1933-45). So the New Deal - a wide array of federal social and economic programs to relieve America from the worst side of the recession - was proposed by President Roosevelt. President Roosevelt is thus considered one of the strongest American Presidents of all time because he survived his administration through two tough tests: (1) the Great Depression and (2) World War II. In fact, the president died before WWII ended and his position was taken by Harry Truman. It is for this reason that Eleanor Roosevelt is celebrated as the toughest First Lady of all time. Franklin would not be a success without her (“To what extent did minorities receive a New Deal in the 1930s?”).

The suffering for women from minorities only intensified as the New Deal favored whites only. Luckily, some improvements were initiated in the mid-1930s. John Collier (1884-1968) of the U.S. Office of Indian Affairs did introduce the Indian New Deal in June 1934. This change was for American Indians. John Collier wanted to see American Indians receiving more money for economic development of tribes, promotion of continued Indian culture and supporting tribal governments; instead of forcing American Indians into assimilation (“To what extent did minorities receive a New Deal in the 1930s?”).

Problems faced by African Americans and other minorities include economic ailing of cities and towns forced black men and women and other racial minorities out of jobs to make way for whites. There was collapse in agriculture in the South that brought to an end the tenant farming system. In addition to ghettos turning into slums because of lack of funding, black colleges suffered underfunding as white philanthropists withdrew support (“To what extent did minorities receive a New Deal in the 1930s?”).

By 1935, African Americans started to perceive some affirmative changes. First Lady spearheaded what was called the savior of all blacks. In fact, some referred to her as the first black First Lady for her brave efforts to eliminate discrimination in some federal program. Madam Eleanor (1884-1962) influenced the then Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes (1874-1952) and other powerful politicians to include blacks in federal programs, in relief aids and in appointments to federal positions. This convinced an enormous number of blacks to vote for Franklin Roosevelt in the 1936 election with a Democrat ticket. The half a decade long loyalty blacks showed to Republicans ended instantly. Franklin Roosevelt established an advisory body (cabinet) of African American government employees to advise him on issues affecting them (Trowbridge 2016).

In conclusion the Great Depression brought America to its knees. Jobs were lost, homes were repossessed, children were pulled out of school, and blacks and other minorities were hired today and fired tomorrow without any explanation. Not only was America in trouble, but also the entire world. Despite the challenges brought by the Great Depression, the country rose up and beat all odds to come out even stronger. The New Deal also played a vital role in balancing the equation when it came to needs for all Americans. United States government made amends for the rights deprived of minorities thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt and all those around them (Trowbridge 2016).

#### References

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