

## The Dark 1930s

### Events and Policies

#### **The Great Depression (1929-1939)**

- the 1920s were an era of prosperity, the US grew rich after the WWI, there was high demand for consumer goods
- overproduction of consumer goods: there were more products and the prices were accessible for anyone to buy
- overproduction in agriculture: demand and prices declined, farmers had to produce more to earn the same money
- money policies: the government made buying on credit available for low interest, personal debts were increasing
- margin investing: the stock market enabled buying stock on credit, to pay 10% in cash was enough to buy

#### **The Wall Street Crash (1929)**

- the **Black Tuesday of 24<sup>th</sup> Oct 1929**, the most devastating stock market crash with long-lasting consequences
- stock prices dropped per 17%, investors panicked and attempted to sell their stock, the result was further decline
- people rushed to draw their savings from banks, the banks did not have cash enough, the result was their bankrupt
- business collapsed, there was mass unemployment of 25%, the results were poverty, homelessness, and migration

#### **Migration to California**

- Great Plains (Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico): areas heavily exploited for agriculture
- Dust Bowl: the region of the Great Plains most devastated by draught, soil erosion, and dust storms
- **hoboes**: tramps travelling on foot or freight trains and trying to get jobs at farms
- **Okies**: a derogative term for migrants from Oklahoma or elsewhere, called by the Californians 'poor white trash'

#### **Herbert Hoover (1874-1964, in office 1929-1933, 31<sup>st</sup> President)**

- laissez faire: the government did not wish to intervene after the Crash, believing the market will help itself
- humanitarianism: Hoover later loaned, though not gave up, some money to local charities
- **Hooverville**: a popular name for shanty towns built by the homeless during the Depression, not inhabited by poor immigrants but by ordinary Americans reduced to poverty

#### **Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945, in office 1933-1945, 32<sup>nd</sup> President)**

- the longest serving President, gave the nation the promise of hope: 'The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.'
- brain trust: Roosevelt gathered around himself a group of advisers, specialists in given fields
- the New Deal (1933-1938): an umbrella term for various government projects for relief, recovery, and reform
- **JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES**: his beliefs that government should stimulate economy influenced the New Deal

#### **The First New Deal**

- lasted for one hundred days, aimed at immediate relief
- banks help: reopened healthy banks, provided government loans for banks
- employment support: authorized new public buildings, employed people at their construction (Hoover Dam at Arizona-Nevada border; Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, California)
- Agricultural Adjustment Act (1933): raised product prices, reduced field acreage to restore the original landscape
- **Civilian Conservation Corps (1933-1942)**: a uniformed brigade employing young men aged between 18 and 25 at protecting natural sources (National Parks) and providing for them accommodation in camps

#### **The Second New Deal**

- Works Progress Administration (1935): offered jobs in community services to anyone in need, including women
- Social Security Act (1935): introduced the first US welfare system for children, the unemployed, the old, etc.
- **Federal Project Number One (1935)**: a series of programmes supporting the arts and providing employment for writers, musicians, theatre actors, visual artists, etc.
- Federal Writers Project: a subprogramme employing writers to produce guidebooks and also encouraging tourism (RICHARD WRIGHT, RALPH ELLISON, ZORA NEALE HURSTON, SAUL BELLOW, JOHN CHEEVER)

### Culture

- fashion: 45-degree cuts, ankle-length skirts
- leisure activities: music, films, crime novels, board games (Monopoly), gambling

### Sports

- horse racing
- baseball: JOE DiMAGGIO, LOU GEHRIG
- Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York (1932)

## Music

- supported by the Federal Music Project, a part of the New Deal

### Big Bands

- **swing** music developed from jazz, gained immediate popularity, was played by many white musicians
- DUKE ELLINGTON and his band
- BENNY GOODMAN (white): clarinetist, songwriter, bandleader
- GLENN MILLER (white): trombonist, composer, bandleader
- TOMMY DORSEY (white): trombonist, trumpet player, bandleader

### Songs

- JOHNNY MERCER: songwriter, lyricists, singer
- WOODY GUTHRIE: folk singer and songwriter, hired to entertain young men in the working camps, author of 'Ain't God No Home' or 'This Land is Your Land' (a song in response to Irving Berlin's 'God Bless America', almost became a national anthem instead of the 'Star-Spangled Banner' in 1931)
- KATE SMITH: singer, most famous for her rendering of 'God Bless America'

### Musicals

- Broadway musicals and musical films became popular
- *Top Hat* (1935): a musical film, with the dancing couple FRED ASTAIRE and GINGER ROGERS, music by IRVING BERLIN
- *Porgy and Bess* (1935): an opera from African-American life, with music by GEORGE GERSHWIN ('Summertime')

## Pictorial Arts

- supported by Federal Arts Project

### Abstract Expressionism

- JACKSON POLLOCK, WILLEM DE KOONING

### Regionalism/Scene Painting

- GRANT WOOD: Iowa regionalism, author of 'American Gothic' (1930)
- THOMAS HART BENTON: Midwest regionalism, social realism, author of mural series *America Today* (1930-1931)
- JOHN STEUART CURRY: Kansas regionalism, painter and muralist, author of 'Tragic Prelude' depicting John Brown and the conflict of Bleeding Kansas (1938 - 1940)

### Social Realism

- DIEGO RIVERA (Frieda Kahlo's husband): a Mexican painter and muralist, author of mural series *Detroit Industry* (1932-1933) at the Detroit Institute of Arts, also author of 'Man at the Crossroads' (1933) at the Rockefeller Centre (the mural was removed because it contained a depiction of Lenin)
- BEN SHAHN: a Lithuanian-American painter and muralist, author of the *Sacco and Vanzetti* series
- ISAAC SOYER: a Russia-born painter, focused on working class life scenes, author of 'Laundress'
- EDWARD HOPPER: painter, author of the 'New York Movie Theatre'
- DOROTHEA LANGE: photographer, author of 'Migrant Mother'

## Architecture

- FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT: Fallingwater (1935), a house incorporated into the landscape, off Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- New York **Art Deco**: Chrysler Building (1930), Empire State Building (1931), Rockefeller Centre (1939)
- Mount Rushmore, near Keystone, South Dakota: granite sculptures of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln

## Film

- EDWARD G. ROBINSON: gangster actor
- JAMES CAGNEY: dancer, tough guy actor, sex symbol
- BÉLA LUGOSI: horror film actor, incorporated the title character in *Dracula* (1931)
- BORIS KARLOFF: horror film actor, incorporated the title monster in *Frankenstein* (1931)

- MARX BROTHERS: a team of sibling vaudeville comedians and film actors
- W. C. FIELDS: a comedian assuming the persona of a misanthrope
- MAE WEST: actress and sex symbol, famous for her bawdy double entendres
- CARY GRANT: incorporated charismatic heroes of noble character
- CLARK GABLE: a sex icon, frequent film partner of Joan Crawford
- VIVIEN LEIGH: a British actress, incorporated Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind* (1939)
- ORSON WELLES: actor and director
- other actresses: JEAN HARLOW, GRETA GARBO, JOAN CRAWFORD
- other actors: JAMES STEWART, CHARLIE CHAPLIN
- other films: *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)