**The Great Depression**

Together, World War I and the Spanish Flue had killed almost 90 million people between 1914 and 1919. The 1920s were spent forgetting the horrors of the previous decade. The world rebuilt itself, and then partied their blues away as if the fun would never end. However, the fun did end…and rather abruptly. In October of 1929, the stock market crashed, resulting in the Great Depression of the 1930s and the 1940s, a time of high unemployment, lost savings, homelessness and poverty.

**Depression's Impact on African Americans**

African Americans suffered more than most during the Great Depression, and the good times of the 1920s had been as hard on African Americans as the 1930s were for Whites. During the Depression the national unemployment rate may have been 1 in 4 unemployed, but for African Americans it was 1 in 2.

The entire nation was suffering through the Great Depression, but for African Americans things were the worst they had been since the days of slavery. Many of the soup kitchens and breadlines that served the poor excluded African Americans altogether. The foreclosure rate for African Americans was higher than the national average. Things had been hard for African Americans before the Great Depression, especially in the South as sharecropping (working the land as tenant farmers) was the predominant way of life. However, with the coming of the Great Depression, their hardships compounded themselves exponentially with little hope that things would get better.

**Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal**

In the Election of 1932, the Democrats and New York senator **Franklin Roosevelt** spoke the language of the downtrodden. The Democrats and Roosevelt won the White House and Congress that year, and ushered in the **New Deal**, Roosevelt's public policy program to end the Great Depression.

It encompassed measures to shore up banking, programs that would put people back to work, and new policies regarding farmers and stabilizing their crop prices. There was something in the New Deal for all Americans, because across the country…everyone needed the government's help.

**New Deal's Impact on African Americans Benefits**

African Americans benefited from many of Roosevelt's New Deal programs such as the following:

* **Works Progress Administration** employed over 300,000 African Americans
* **Civilian Conservation Corp** employed over 300,000 African Americans
* **Public Works Administration** set quotas for the number of African Americans that had to be hired for all construction jobs

Roosevelt's New Deal education programs also taught more than 1 million African Americans to read and write. More skilled and educated African Americans were hired as engineers, librarians, lawyers, and architects under New Deal programs.

Advancements like these shifted African American voting habits towards the Democratic Party and away from the Republicans for the first time since Lincoln.

**Shortfalls**

There were, however, many shortfalls for African Americans under the New Deal. The Federal Housing Program created affordable government subsidized housing for the poor during the Great Depression. However, it was catered to Whites, rejecting African Americans from getting housing loans, and forcing them to remain in poorer neighborhoods. It was essentially state-sponsored segregation.

Even when measures were put in place to prevent discrimination at the federal level, discrimination continued the local level across the South.

Due to discrimination in hiring practices, unemployment levels remained high for African Americans despite the thousands the New Deal programs employed. Even when African Americans were hired, they paid less than their White counterparts for the same work.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act paid farmers not to farm in order to deplete crop surpluses and increase crop prices. However, African Americans did not own the land they farmed; they were sharecroppers. The wages they earned from sharecropping were determined by the Whites they worked for, and any proceeds from the sale of crops went to White landowners.

**Black Brain Trust**

One of Roosevelt's most valuable contributions to African Americans during the Great Depression was listening to their problems from those who understood them best: African Americans.

Roosevelt's **Black Brain Trust** (aka Black Cabinet or Federal Council of Negro Affairs) gathered African American individuals who provided valuable insight into education, labor, and various economic issues that were exclusive to their group. Included were the likes of Mary McCleod Bethune, Robert Vann, Eugene Jones, and Robert Weaver. Many of the gains that African Americans enjoyed under the New Deal were thanks to them as much as to Roosevelt himself.

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| Weaver and Bethune |
| ***Robert Weaver (left) and Mary McCleod Bethune (right) served on the Black Brain Trust*** |

**Summary**

When the **Great Depression** began after the stock market crashed in 1929, African Americans were already struggling. **Franklin Roosevelt** understood their suffering created the **New Deal** programs to aid all Americans. The **Works Progress Administration** and **Civilian Conservation Corp** employed over 300,000 African Americans each, while the **Public Works Administration** set quotas for the number of African Americans that had to be hired for all construction jobs. However, hiring still faced discrimination and those who were employed were paid less than Whites.

The Federal Housing Program was established to give loans for housing but was segregated in nature and so often did not benefit African Americans. The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) paid farmers not to grow crops in order to reduce surpluses and increase crop prices but did not benefit African Americans because they were predominantly sharecroppers.

Roosevelt's **Black Brain Trust** gathered African American individuals who provided valuable insight into education, labor, and various economic issues that were exclusive to their group

Questions to Answer:

1. What caused the shift from prosperity to depression in the United States in the 1920s?
2. What were the economic and social effects of the Great Depression?
3. How did the New Deal benefit African Americans?
4. How did the New Deal bring shortfalls for African Americans?
5. How did FDR contribute to African Americans during the Great Depression?