

Up From the Dust Timeline

May 10, 1869—Workers complete construction on America's first transcontinental railroad line. Spanning from the eastern side of the Missouri River to the Pacific coast at San Francisco Bay, the railroad shortened what had once been a six-to-eight-month journey by wagon to a week-long train ride.

1893—The stock market crashes, leading to “The Panic of 1893.” The United States Treasury goes bankrupt, and the economy collapses as people withdraw deposited funds and banks fail.

1909—Congress passes the Enlarged Homestead Act, increasing federal land grants to 320 acres for homesteaders willing to settle on and farm the land for five years. New “dry farming” techniques make land in the southern Great Plains, once thought to be useless for agriculture, attractive to farmers.

1917—U.S. enters World War I; the federal government decides wheat production is essential to the war effort and establishes a guaranteed price per bushel for the crop.

1929—Benefiting from easy access to credit and new, productivity-boosting farming technologies, American wheat farmers produce record amounts of wheat. But this leads to prices dropping due to oversupply.

March 4, 1929—Herbert Hoover is inaugurated as the 31st President of the United States.

October 29, 1929—The stock market crashes, beginning the worst and longest-lasting economic crisis in the history of the United States. The date comes to be known as “Black Tuesday.”

1930—4.3 million Americans are unemployed.

June 17, 1930—President Hoover signs the Tariff Act of 1930 (also known as the Smoot-Hawley Act), which raises the tariff (tax) on over 20,000 goods imported to the country. Wealthy business owners support the tariff because it makes it more difficult for foreign companies to sell their goods in the U.S. However, the tariff hurts the economy more than it helps.

July 4-15, 1930—The Communist Party holds a convention in Chicago and establishes the Unemployed Councils of the U.S.A., with branches in several major cities. The Unemployed Councils organizes direct action protests and calls for unemployment insurance and relief for the jobless.

1931—8 million Americans are unemployed.

1931—The Midwestern and Southern Plains are plunged into a severe and lasting drought, which causes the death of millions of acres of crops. Due to the over-plowed land, dust blows and so-called “black blizzards” begin.

Up From the Dust Timeline

December 7, 1931—As Congress convenes, the first national hunger march brings to Washington, D.C. more than 1,500 protesters, selected at local conferences and demonstrations. The marchers demand unemployment insurance and relief. Hunger marches continue on state capitals around the country.

1932—12 million Americans are unemployed.

June, 1932—20,000 World War I veterans stage a Bonus March to the Capitol in Washington, D.C., demanding that their war bonuses be distributed immediately. U.S. troops disperse the protesters by force and burn their encampment to the ground.

November 8, 1932—Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) is elected as the 32nd President of the United States.

1933—12.8 million Americans are unemployed.

1933—More than 200,000 farmers lose their farms to bank foreclosures. The highest rates of farm foreclosure are in the South and Great Plains.

March 4, 1933—FDR is inaugurated. During his first 100 days in office, he immediately addresses the crisis of the Great Depression by sending fifteen major bills to Congress and establishing major New Deal programs, including the following:

March 6, 1933—Only two days after taking office, President Roosevelt declares a “bank holiday” in which banking transactions are temporarily suspended until March 10. During this four-day period, Congress passes the Emergency Banking Act, enabling banks that were stable to reopen while assisting those that were not.

March 12, 1933—FDR gives his first “fireside chat” radio address to 60-million Americans. Folksy and reassuring in tone, fireside chats explained what his administration is doing to help people in need and ease the nation through the Great Depression.

May 12, 1933—Congress passes the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), a farm relief bill. The program sets temporary guaranteed prices for many crops and livestock and pays farmers to decrease their production.

April 5, 1933—Roosevelt issues an executive order establishing the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which provides temporary work for 3 million young men and income for their families. The men live in military-style camps, construct recreation facilities, and carry out conservation projects.

Up From the Dust Timeline

June 16, 1933—Roosevelt signs the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). NIRA uses government power to regulate markets, raise prices, and increase wages, while also guaranteeing workers the right to organize into labor unions.

June 16, 1933—The NIRA includes a spending program called the Public Works Administration (PWA). The PWA further promotes economic growth by creating a budget for public works projects in order to stimulate employment and rebuild industrial America.

1934—11.3 million Americans are unemployed.

1934—Black and white sharecroppers in Arkansas organize the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union to fight back against unjust treatment by landlords.

May 1934—Dust storms spread from the Dust Bowl area to 75% of the country. At its height, the worst drought in U.S. history affects 27 states.

November 1934—Democrats sweep the fall elections and gain overwhelming dominance in Congress, indicating the popularity of the New Deal.

1935—10.6 million Americans are unemployed.

January 15, 1935—The federal government organizes the Drought Relief Service. In emergency areas where cattle are at risk of starving because of the drought, the Drought Relief Service pays farmers and ranchers for their undernourished cattle and either kills them or sends them to a slaughterhouse.

April 8, 1935—In response to continued widespread unemployment, Congress passes the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act. This act includes the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which gives people work by creating projects for them such as building schools, bridges, or other public structures. One popular WPA program, the Federal Writers' Project, gives work to unemployed writers. Over time, the WPA proved to be extremely successful, with 8.5 million people hired for 1.4 million jobs.

April 14, 1935—The worst "black blizzard" of the Dust Bowl causes extensive damage to the southern Great Plains; the day lives on in local memory as "Black Sunday."

May 27, 1935—The Supreme Court declares the NRA unconstitutional in *Schechter Poultry Corporation vs. United States*. This ruling dissolves one of FDR's main accomplishments in the first New Deal.

July 6, 1935—Congress passes the National Labor Relations Act, also known as the Wagner Act. The Wagner Act addresses the basic rights of private sector employees to join and create trade unions and bargain with their employers. The act also creates a National Labor Relations Board to hold hearings on labor disputes.

Up From the Dust Timeline

August 15, 1935—FDR signs the nation's first Social Security Act. It provides benefits for the unemployed, disabled, dependent women and children, and senior citizens.

Fall 1935—The Resettlement Administration (soon to become the Farm Security Administration, or FSA) begins a photography program, sending documentary photographers around the country to take photos of how the Great Depression was impacting ordinary Americans.

November 14, 1935—John L. Lewis establishes the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). A coalition of labor unions that coordinated workers in industrial unions in the U.S. and Canada, the CIO supports FDR and the New Deal and remains in operation for twenty years.

1935-1936—In response to the upcoming 1936 election and criticism that the New Deal is not accomplishing enough for Americans, FDR initiates a second New Deal focusing on more radical policies.

1936—9 million Americans are unemployed.

November 3, 1936—FDR is re-elected for a second term in the White House, winning by a landslide over Republican candidate Alf Landon (losing only two states, New Hampshire and Vermont).

1937—7.7 million Americans are unemployed.

March 1937—The federal government begins the Shelterbelt Project, with the goal of planting trees across the Great Plains in order to protect against soil erosion. Disputes over funding limit the program's effectiveness.

1938—10.4 million Americans are unemployed.

1938—Thanks to conservation efforts undertaken by the CCC and Soil Conservation Service, there is a 65% reduction in soil blowing, although the drought continues.

1939—9.5 million Americans are unemployed.

1939—In the fall of 1939, rain finally begins to fall again on the Great Plains, putting an end to the eight-year drought.

September 1, 1939—World War II begins in Europe.

December 7, 1941—The Imperial Japanese Navy attacks Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In response to the attack, the United States enters World War II. After entering into the war, the U.S. economy is revitalized and the country heads out of the Great Depression.