

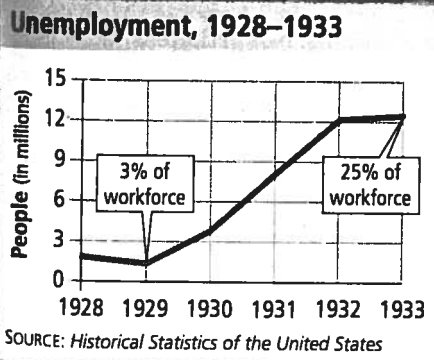
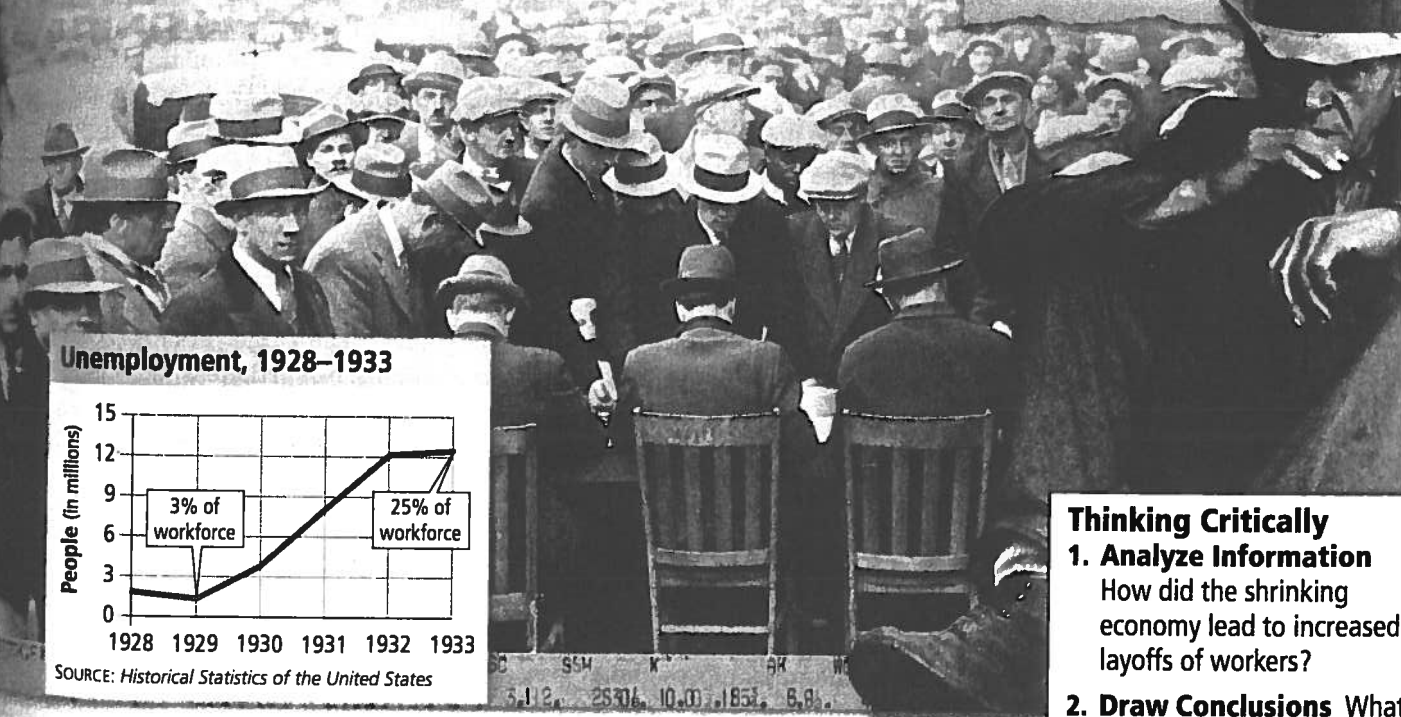
● INFOGRAPHIC

Effects of the Great Depression

After the stock market crash, the American economy slowed to a crawl in the face of a devastating global depression. Bank failures more than quadrupled from 1929 to 1933. Companies fired thousands of workers to keep from going out of business. As a result, unemployment soared, condemning a quarter of the American workforce to poverty. (See the line graph below.) Jobless people crowded outside employment offices, clamoring for work to put food on their tables. Life became a daily struggle for many Americans during these lean times.

Unemployed men wait for a chance to register for municipal jobs in New York City in 1933. ▼

Top: Women and children wait in a bread line set up by a religious mission.
Center: This 1932 cartoon summarized the feelings of many depositors when their banks failed.
Bottom right: Unable to support their families, some men gave in to despair.



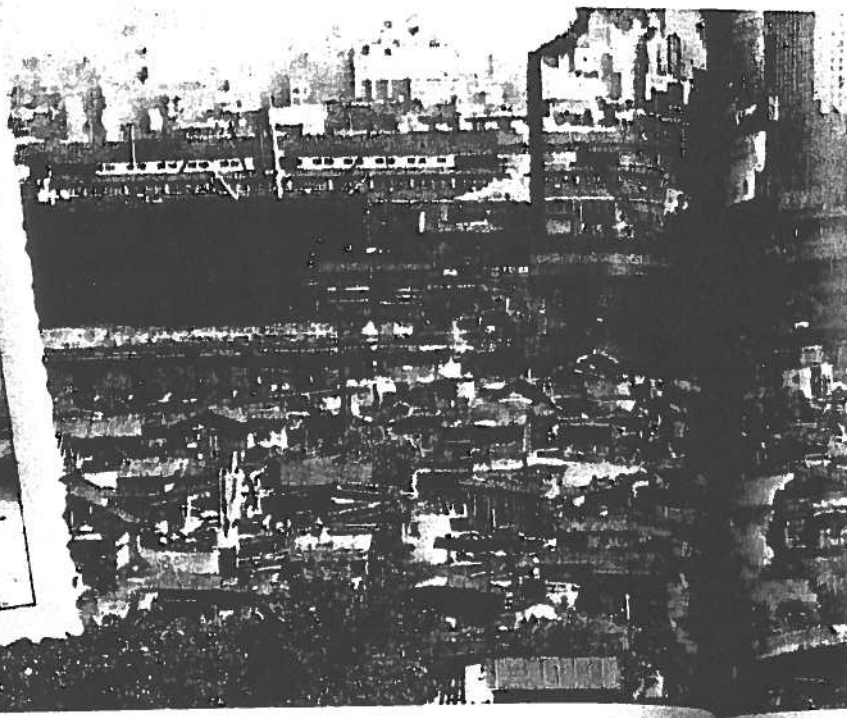
Thinking Critically

- Analyze Information**
How did the shrinking economy lead to increased layoffs of workers?
- Draw Conclusions** What effect might a high unemployment rate have on the wages of Americans who still had jobs?

Harburg said the song asked a simple question about the nature of the depression. "This is a man who says: I built the railroads. . . I fought your wars. . . [Why] should I be standing in line now? What happened to all this wealth I created?"

Looking for a Place to Live As Americans lost their jobs and ran through their savings, they had to scrounge wherever they could to keep from going hungry. They sold furniture, pawned jewelry, and moved to cheaper lodgings—anything to keep their pantries stocked and rents paid. In many cities, they ran out of money, were evicted from their homes, and ended up on the streets.

Old worker's home in California



Americans Face Hard Times
Photographs of the 1930s conveyed
the gritty realism of daily life under
the boot heels of hunger, homeless-
ness, and destitution. Cartoonists of

Homeless people slept on park benches, in empty railway cars, or in cardboard boxes. Many grouped together in **Hoovervilles**, makeshift shantytowns of tents and shacks built on public land or vacant lots. Homeless people, some of whom had worked as skilled carpenters before the crisis, cobbled houses together out of lumber scraps, tar paper, tin, and glass. One of the largest Hoovervilles in the country sprang up in the middle of Central Park in New York City. There, the homeless covered themselves with newspapers, called Hoover blankets, to stay warm at night. They walked around looking for jobs with their empty pants pockets turned inside out, a sign of poverty known as Hoover flags.

Despite the difficulties of life during the depression, many Americans did what they could to boost morale and help their neighbors. During a New York City newspaper strike, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia read comic strips to children over the radio. In Reading, Pennsylvania, members of the Taxpayers Protection League staged nonviolent protests to thwart evictions. Nevertheless, thousands of other Americans found no such escapes from their misery.

Checkpoint How did the Great Depression affect American cities in the early 1930s?

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