

Name _____

Shifting Tides

The Great Depression was not only a time of economic hardship but also a period of profound social and political change that reshaped the fabric of American society. As the nation grappled with the challenges of the Depression, significant shifts occurred in social attitudes, government policies, and the role of the federal government in the lives of its citizens.

One of the most significant social changes that occurred during the Great Depression was the shift in public perception of the role of government in addressing economic inequality and providing social welfare. Prior to the Depression, the prevailing ideology emphasized individualism and self-reliance, with limited government intervention in the economy. However, the severity of the economic crisis exposed the shortcomings of this approach, leading to calls for government action to alleviate poverty and suffering.

As a result, the federal government expanded its role in providing social welfare programs and implementing economic reforms aimed at addressing the root causes of the Depression. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives, such as the establishment of Social Security, unemployment insurance, and minimum wage laws, represented a significant departure from previous laissez-faire policies and marked a new era of government intervention in the economy.

The Great Depression sparked a wave of political activism and grassroots organizing as people sought to advocate for their rights and demand change. Labor unions gained strength during this time, organizing strikes and protests to demand better wages, working conditions, and job security for workers. The passage of labor-friendly legislation, such as the National Labor Relations Act, which protected workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively, reflected the growing influence of labor unions in shaping government policies.

The Great Depression prompted a reevaluation of the role of the federal government in regulating the financial sector and ensuring economic stability. The passage of landmark legislation such as the Glass-Steagall Act, which regulated banks and separated commercial and investment banking activities, aimed to prevent another financial crisis like the one that precipitated the Great Depression.

In summary, the Great Depression brought about significant social and political changes that transformed American society and government. The expansion of social welfare programs, the rise of political activism, and increased government regulation of the economy were all legacies of this turbulent period in American history.



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Reading Comprehension Questions

1. What was a significant shift in public perception of the role of government during the Great Depression?

- A) Increased emphasis on individualism and self-reliance
- B) Calls for government action to alleviate poverty and suffering
- C) Expansion of government intervention in the economy
- D) Decreased government involvement in social welfare programs

2. How did President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives change government policies?

- A) By reducing government intervention in the economy
- B) By establishing Social Security and minimum wage laws
- C) By weakening labor unions
- D) By promoting laissez-faire policies

3. What was a consequence of the rise of labor unions during the Great Depression?

- A) Increased activism and demands for better wages and working conditions
- B) Weakening of labor-friendly legislation
- C) Decreased advocacy for workers' rights
- D) Expansion of government intervention in the economy

4. What was the purpose of the Glass-Steagall Act?

- A) To promote laissez-faire policies
- B) To weaken labor unions
- C) To regulate banks and prevent another financial crisis
- D) To decrease government involvement in social welfare programs

5. What were some of the lasting legacies of the Great Depression on American society and government?

- A) Increased emphasis on individualism and self-reliance
- B) Weakening of labor unions and labor-friendly legislation
- C) Decreased political activism and grassroots organizing
- D) Expansion of social welfare programs and government regulation of the economy