



THE GREAT DEPRESSION – USING CENSUS DATA TO ADDRESS AN ECONOMIC CRISIS

TEACHER VERSION

Subject Level:

High School History

Grade Level:

11-12

Approx. Time Required:

60-75 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to analyze map data on U.S. unemployment in 1937 and explain the value of collecting such data during the Great Depression (between decennial census years).
- Students will be able to formulate a position on the New Deal and support it with specific data.

Activity Description

Students will identify the connection between government statistics and government programs by examining the problems from the Great Depression that led to the implementation of the New Deal. Students will also use census data to support a point of view on the New Deal.

Suggested Grade Level:

11-12

Approximate Time Required:

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Learning Objectives:

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Topics:

- Enumeration
- The Great Depression
- The New Deal

Skills Taught:

- Analyzing historical data
 - Formulating a position on a historical issue
 - Making inferences
 - Reading and interpreting maps
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Material Required

- The student version of this activity, 6 pages; it contains images that should be printed in color.

Activity Items

The following items are part of this activity. Items, their sources, and any relevant instructions for viewing them online appear at the end of this teacher version.

- Item 1: Unemployment Census Photo
- Item 2: Map of the United States Showing Geographic Divisions: 1937
- Item 3: Percentage of the Population 15 to 74 Years of Age in Enumerative Check Areas Unemployed (Including Emergency Workers) and Partly Unemployed, by Sex, for Geographic Divisions: 1937

For more information to help you introduce your students to the U.S. Census Bureau, read "[*Census Bureau 101 for Students*](#)." This information sheet can be printed and passed out to your students as well.

Standards Addressed

See charts below. For more information, read "[*Overview of Education Standards and Guidelines Addressed in Statistics in Schools Activities*](#)."

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts of Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

Standard	Strand	Cluster
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2</p> <p>Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.</p>	<p>RH 11-12 - History/ Social Studies</p>	<p>Key Ideas and Details</p>
<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7</p> <p>Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.</p>	<p>RH 11-12 - History/ Social Studies</p>	<p>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</p>

UCLA National Standards for History: U.S. History Content Standards

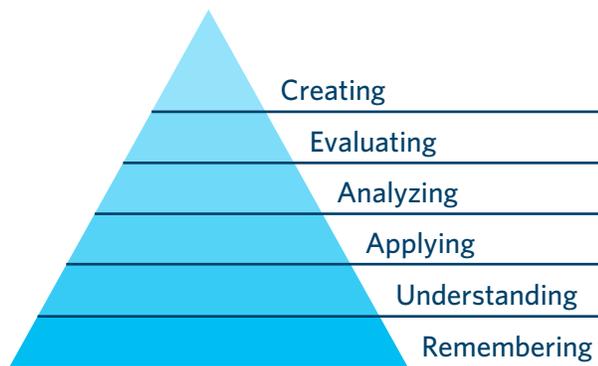
Era	Standard
8 - The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)	Standard 2: How the New Deal addressed the Great Depression, transformed American federalism, and initiated the welfare state.

UCLA National Standards for History: Historical Thinking Standards

Standard	Description
Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation	Compare and contrast different sets of ideas. Students will analyze the benefits and limitations of decennial census questionnaires in 1930 and 1940.
Standard 5: Historical Issues	Evaluate the implementation of a decision. Students will analyze data from the 1937 Enumerative Check Census to simulate the decision-making process that government leaders followed regarding the New Deal.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Students will **analyze** 1937 unemployment data on a map.



Teacher Notes

Before the Activity

Students should have an understanding of the following ideas and concepts:

- The impact of the Great Depression
- The specific social reforms and economic programs that resulted from the New Deal

Teachers should explain to students that the American Community Survey, conducted monthly by the Census Bureau, is designed to show how communities are changing. Through asking questions of a sample of the population, it produces national data on more than 35 categories of information, such as education, income, housing, and employment.

Teachers should encourage students to think of situations in their daily lives when they gather data. Teachers could prompt students by asking them if they check the weather before getting dressed or if they check the traffic before getting on the road.

During the Activity

Teachers should have students read the activity introduction and should address any questions about its contents.

After the Activity

Teachers should have students share their answers to question 9 to spark a class discussion.

Extension Ideas

- Teachers could have students research the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 and discuss or debate whether the act encouraged economic recovery or extended the effects of the Great Depression.
- Teachers could instruct students to find current examples from newspapers or TV broadcasts that show how the government uses census data to guide decision-making.

Student Activity

Click [here](#) to download a printable version for students.

Activity Items

The following items are part of this activity and appear at the end of this student version.

- Item 1: Unemployment Census Photo
- Item 2: Map of the United States Showing Geographic Divisions: 1937
- Item 3: Percentage of the Population 15 to 74 Years of Age in Enumerative Check Areas Unemployed (Including Emergency Workers) and Partly Unemployed, by Sex, for Geographic Divisions: 1937

Student Learning Objectives

- I will be able to analyze map data on U.S. unemployment in 1937 and explain the value of collecting such data during the Great Depression (between decennial census years).
- I will be able to formulate a position on the New Deal and support it with specific data.

Introduction

As part of the 1930 decennial census, near the start of the Great Depression, people were asked about their employment status. If they weren't working on the workday before the count, they answered additional questions on their ability to work, the status of their job search, the duration of their past employment, and the reason for their unemployment.

But legislators and decision-makers needed more data, delivered more often, to understand the depth of the economic crisis and to support the implementation of the New Deal. So in 1937, before the 1940 decennial census, the U.S. Census Bureau conducted two unemployment censuses. The first was a voluntary self-selected census sent to every residential address in the United States. The second was called the Enumerative Check Census and was delivered to approximately 510,000 households, marking the first attempt to estimate unemployment nationwide by surveying random samples of the population. Interestingly, the Census Bureau randomly chose areas canvassed by postal route (excluding those in business areas); however, this method excluded the 18 percent of people who did not live on a postal route, so it was not as accurate as was hoped. (See **Item 1: Unemployment Census Photo** for context.)

Although the voluntary census was delivered to every residence, the resulting rate of unemployment was underreported. The Enumerative Check Census actually found a more accurate rate of unemployment for the nation.

The first decennial census to use statistical sampling was in 1940. The method made it possible to ask additional detailed questions of the population without significantly increasing the cost or respondent burden. Enumerators (Census Bureau workers) that year asked a random sample (about 5 percent) of the population a set of questions separate from those in the decennial census questionnaire. The Census Bureau then used the sample to estimate demographic data for the nation.

Sampling was a fixture of the decennial censuses through the end of the 20th century, with a certain percentage of the population required to fill out longer questionnaires with more detailed questions. Now the Census Bureau conducts its American Community Survey every month to gather this type of information.

1. At the time of the 1930 Census, considering the widespread impact of the stock market crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, why might people have been reluctant to provide information on their employment status in a census questionnaire conducted in person by an enumerator?

Student answers will vary but could include that people might have been uncomfortable sharing their unemployment status and reluctant to provide personal information to the government.

2. What were advantages and disadvantages of collecting data on unemployment in 1937, between the decennial censuses of 1930 and 1940?

Student answers will vary, but students should note that an advantage was having more current information about the economic crisis so the government could provide needed resources and that one disadvantage was that the 1937 unemployment census cost government money to administer.

3. What were the advantages and disadvantages of asking a random sample of the population questions in addition to those in the decennial census questionnaire?

Student answers will vary, but advantages include that the method made it possible to find out more information about the population without spending much more money or burdening the majority of census respondents. Also, in comparison with a voluntary survey of the nation, a survey that uses random sampling can represent the population more accurately.

Disadvantages include that some members of the population who didn't get a chance to answer the additional questions might have felt disconnected to the government during a time of increased need. In addition, some people could question the reliability of estimating results from the random sample to the entire population.

4. Looking at **Item 2: Map of the United States Showing Geographic Divisions: 1937** and **Item 3: Percentage of the Population 15 to 74 Years of Age in Enumerative Check Areas Unemployed (Including Emergency Workers) and Partly Unemployed, by Sex, for Geographic Divisions: 1937**, what region(s) of the country had the highest percentages of total unemployment for both men and women?

New England had the highest rate, followed by the Middle Atlantic.

5. Which region likely required the least amount of money for New Deal programs? Explain your answer using data from **Item 3**.

The West North Central region, because it had the lowest total unemployment rates for both men and women in 1937.

6. Imagine you are a congressperson in 1938 and that President Franklin D. Roosevelt is asking for more money for his New Deal program. Use data from **Item 3** and your background knowledge of this time period to support an argument for or against increasing New Deal funding.

Student answers will vary but should be supported by specific data in the item.

7. Which New Deal programs initiated between 1930 and 1940 could have benefited from statistics on unemployment?

Student answers will vary but could include the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Civil Works Administration, the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, the Public Works Administration, Social Security, and the Works Progress Administration.

8. What question topics (other than employment) would have been useful to include in the census sample survey to give legislators a better idea of the impact of the Great Depression on the American family?

Student answers will vary but could include housing, the availability of food, the level of education, personal savings, etc.

9. What kinds of questions do you think are important to include in the American Community Survey to track some of today's significant trends among the U.S. population?

Student answers will vary but could include references to fuel use, such as climate control expenditures or transportation habits.

Item 1: Unemployment Census Photo

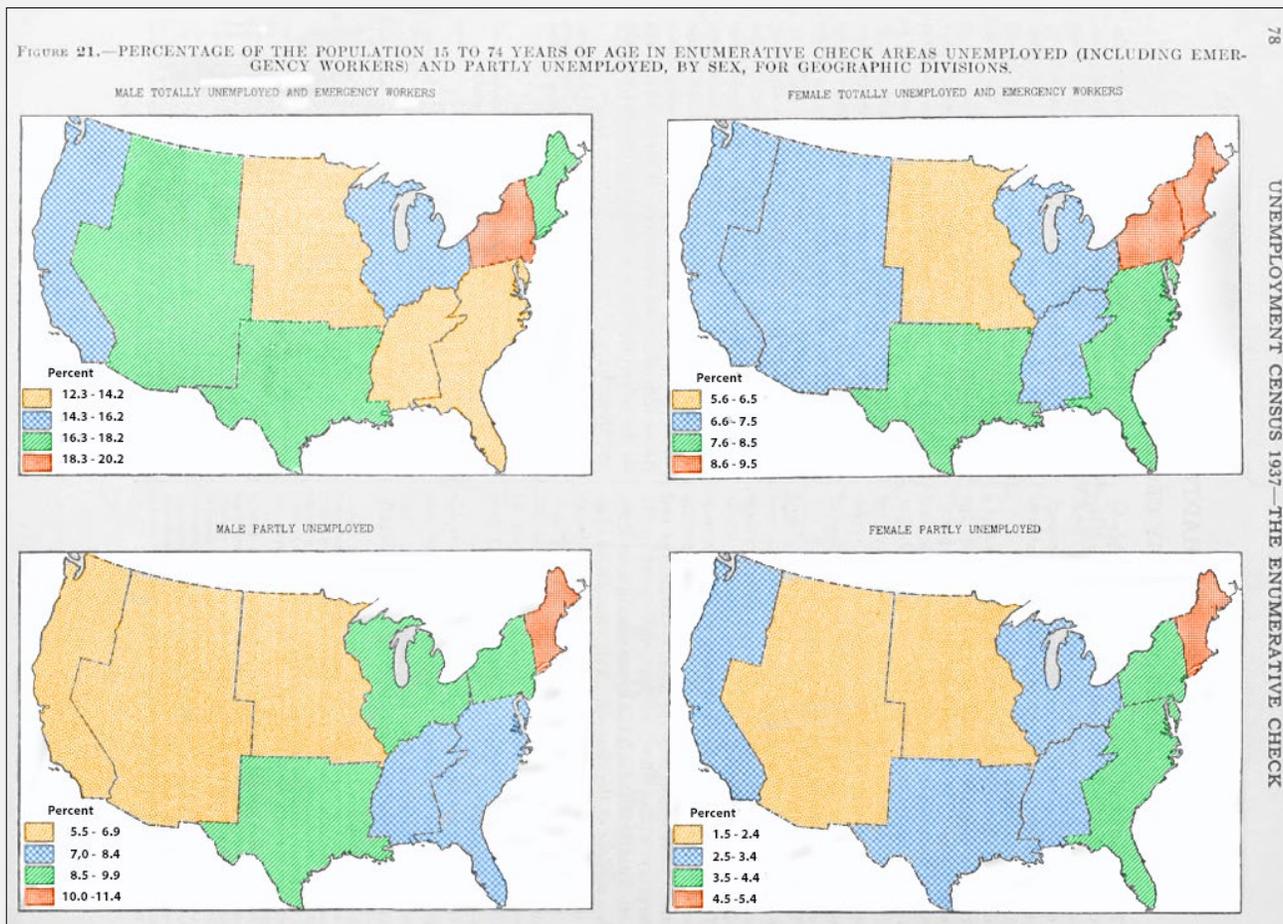


Census Bureau Director William L. Austin and Unemployment Census Director John D. Biggers supervise the receipt and check-in of questionnaires from the 1937 unemployment census, November 24, 1937.

www.census.gov/history/www/sights_sounds/photos/1930_photos.php#

Click on the link above to see the photo gallery online.

Item 3: Percentage of the Population 15 to 74 Years of Age in Enumerative Check Areas Unemployed (Including Emergency Workers) and Partly Unemployed, by Sex, for Geographic Divisions: 1937



archive.org/stream/censusofpartiale04bigg#page/78/mode/2up

Click on the link above to see the original maps.