Mr. Gorham Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

U.S. History/*The Economics of the Great Depression* Block: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**The Human Toll of the Great Depression:**

**Selected Statistics & Anecdotes**

* By the end of 1932, 9 million savings accounts had been wiped out.
* The auto industry was operating at 20% capacity; steel plants were at 12% capacity.
* By 1932, 660,000 Chicagoans were unemployed; 1M in NYC
* Cleveland had 50% unemployment; Toledo had 80%!
* In Donora, PA only 277 workers out of 13,900 had jobs.
* 100,000 Americans were fired every week.
* In 1932, there were 250,000 fewer marriages; the birth rate declined.
* Education of children ceased in some areas; in others, shoeless children could not attend school in winter. One schoolgirl was asked where her lunch was. She said it was her brother’s turn to eat that day.
* American trade declined from $10 billion in 1929 to $3 billion in 1932.
* Wheat dropped from $1.05 to 39 cents.
* U.S. farm income dropped from $12 billion to $5 billion.
* The Empire State Building stopped running the elevators from the 42d to the 67th floors.
* In 1931, one railroad company counted 186,028 migrants (hobos).
* By 1932, between 1 and 2 million men, including young boys, were roaming the country. Venereal disease and sexual assaults were common.
* In St. Louis, men, women and children hung out at the city’s dumps to dig for rotten food.
* Families stood outside the backdoors of restaurants to scavenge for discarded leftovers.
* In 1931, 238 persons were admitted to New York hospitals due to malnutrition; 45 of them died.
* Companies, desperate to cut costs, lowered wages. In one factory, girls as young as 13 were paid 20 cents per day (that is only $50 per year!)
* In December 1931, the Bank of the United States in New York collapsed; it had 400,000 depositors.
* By 1931, $1 billion had been removed from the U.S. banks and kept in attics, cellars.
* In July, 1932, Hoover vetoed the Garner-Wagner Relief Bill which would have provided direct relief from the federal government in the form of public works jobs.
* To provide jobs to more men, Boston used hand shovels for snow removal instead of snowplows and trucks.
* In July, 1931 300 men broke into a food warehouse in Oklahoma.
* The homeless camps in every large city became known as “Hoovervilles.” Newspapers were “Hoover blankets.” Rabbits were “Hoover hogs.”
* In 1931, only 36,000 immigrants entered the U.S.; 103,000 Americans left the country!
* In Oakland, CA there was a city of people living in unused sewer pipes.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* One couple, a carpenter and a maid, lived in a cave in Central Park, NYC for a year.
* In West Virginia mining counties, doctors found that children were 12% below healthy weight having a diet of only beans and potatoes and not having milk since weaning.
* In rural PA 216,000 out of 800,000 schoolchildren were undernourished; children starved to death in Oakland, CA and Troy, NY.
* From 1929 and 1932 the suicide rate rose from 14 per 100,000 to 17.4.
* In 1931 a midwife in Kentucky, Molly Jackson, reported that 37 babies had died in her arms from malnourishment (“Their little stomachs busted open.”)
* Miners in coal country (WV, PA, KY) lived on “water sandwiches” – stale bread soaked in lard and water.
* In Harlan County, KY families were reduced to living on wild greens (they ate the weeds the cows ate because cows do not eat poison weeds).
* In 1930, 1100 men in a bread line (!) in NYC attacked trucks delivering baked goods to a NYC hotel.
* In 1929, the country’s largest industrial company, United States Steel, employed 224,980 full-time employees. In 1931, that number had dropped to 53, 619. On April 1, 1933 there were zero.
* A group of 40 stenographers returned to work after being unemployed for a year. When they faced their employers and began typing, many of them broke down emotionally.
* In November 1930, a Pennsylvania man, Joseph Drusin, stole a loaf of bread from his neighbor to feed his four children; when caught he went to the cellar and hung himself.

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“With the present breakdown, we have come to the end of something. This is a turning point in our history, the first real crisis since the Civil War.”

*--Author Edmund Wilson*

“Man, you don’t know you are alive. Spend a week at this spot and I’ll show you some things about these United States that will make you sick, or maybe afraid. Something is wrong.”

*--A man at a camp in California for the homeless*

1. The following statistics and anecdotes are taken from ***The Lean Years*** by Irving Bernstein. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)