

What were the causes of the dust bowl in the 1930's

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Cause and Effect In the 1930s, the United States was hit by a severe drought lasting almost a decade that described one of the worst events in its climatic history. The Dust Bowl, as the drought was known, devastated the Great Plains in the central states region of the United States, drying up the already depressed economy resulting in damages worth millions of dollars. With Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas being the worst affected areas, it caused human, economical and ecological misery, driving farmers off their land in search of other income sources (Link, Woofter & Taylor 19). This paper will examine the causal factors and discuss their relationship with the Dust Bowl. The immediate cause attached to the drought by climate scientists is the absence of soil moisture and vegetative cover of the land (Hurt 9). However, a convergence of fate, manmade and natural factors can be held responsible for the circumstances. They include the climate, soil composition, over ambitious corporate and civic growth, wind erosion and most notably, human activities such as poor farming methods, coming together to create the stage for the occurrence of the Drought Bowl. Advanced farming techniques, which were initially welcomed, largely contributed to the factors rapidly destroying the land. In the 19th century, attracted by grasslands of the semiarid southern and Midwestern plains in the United States, farmers settled and embarked on farming activities. For decades, they prospered in their farming. They used plows and other farm equipment to work the land and by 1930, more than five million acres of land that had not been previously cultivated was under wheat. Mechanized farming helped them produce the highest crop they had ever realized by 1931 (Warrick, Trainer, Baker & Brinkman 74). With fate playing its part during the production explosion,

there was a period that saw rain that exceeded the known average. Farmers and some corporate bodies wrongly believed that the rain was caused by land disruption, steam produced by trains, plowing and development of land. Naturally, they cultivated more (Landon-Lane, John, Rockoff & Richard 36). So good was the produce that the lure of more led them to abandon the practice of rotation and resting the land. Grasslands, considered as a waste, were ploughed and wheat planted. Exhausted tracts of land due to wheat overplanting were used to graze cattle, destroying further the native grass. The farmers' overproduction of wheat in the presence of the Great Depression resulted in heavy drops of market prices. Unable to earn back their investments, farmers opted to earn profits by expanding their farms. Rather than natural, drought resisting grass varieties, they covered the land with more wheat. Fate acted strangely again, and the rains stopped. The increased mechanized cultivating techniques brought with it bearing of the land by the blowing away of the fertile topsoil. The land was left hostile to growing of crops and prone to drought (Warrick, Trainer, Baker & Brinkman 66). This resulted in great levels of soil erosion, with tons of top soils carried away by the wind. Scientists have recently proven that weather patterns in the 1930s shifted due to changes that took place in the surface temperature of oceans. Tropical temperatures of the Pacific Ocean dropped while those of the Atlantic Ocean rose. With the shifts, the jet stream's flow weakened. A weakened jet stream could not bring moisturized air into the plains from the Gulf of Mexico, which formed its path of flow. Out if this, ideal drought conditions were created, resulting in high temperatures, reduced rainfall and dry air blowing in the Midwest. This also resulted in soil erosion, leaving the

land bare. The Drought Bowl was essentially a dry spell that deprived the land of its nutrients and life sustaining capabilities, which is the direct result of soil erosion, as explained by the scientists. The soil erosion has been shown to have been facilitated by the farmers' efforts to enrich themselves by farming in wheat, which is the manmade aspect of the causes. They took up mechanized farming that, although it increased their yield, ripped the land bare of the vegetation that retains moisture in the soil (Hesse 14). The flourishing business that encouraged the farmers to cultivate more, including land that initially had grass coverage, forms the economic aspect of the causes. Fate came in when the unexpected longer rains led the farmers, and indeed the government too, to believe that it was caused by their farming and industrial activities in the Midwest. In the midst of the looming drought, the rains further washed away the fertile topsoil (Hesse 19). A combination of these factors acting together and culminating into soil erosion can be seen to result in one major effect; the Drought Bowl. Works Cited Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust*. New York: Scholastic Inc, 1997. Print. Hurt, Douglas. *The Dust Bowl: An Agricultural and Social History*. Illinois: Nelson-Hall, 1984. Print. Landon-Lane, John, Hugh, Rockoff & Richard, Steckel. *Droughts, Floods and Financial Distress in the United States*. New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011. Print. Link, I., Woofter, T & Taylor, C. *Research Bulletin: Relief and Rehabilitation in the Drought Area*. Washington: Works Progress Administration, 1937. Print. Warrick, R., Trainer, P., Baker, E. & Brinkman, W. *Drought Hazard in the United States: A Research Assessment*. Colorado: University of Colorado Institute of Behavioral Science, 1975. Print.