

The great depression 1929-33: a sources assignment

[History](#)



Question 1:

Source A is an election poster published by the Democratic Party during the Depression. It is a cynical portrayal, mocking the Republican Party's beliefs. It implies that their policies have no foundations by telling people to smile and hope the Depression will go away, 'This wonderful little gadget will solve the problems of the Nation'. It also says 'WARNING - Do not risk Federal arrest by looking glum'. This is a subtle, sardonic reference to the Bonus Marchers, who had fought in the First World War and who, in May 1932 marched to demand immediate payment of the bonus they had been promised by the government. The quote from the poster refers to the way the government put down the protesters by arresting people and using violence.

This poster gives us evidence about the beliefs of the Democratic Party and the methods employed by it to gain support. However, as the poster is a piece of propaganda and aims to persuade people to support their party it is biased and opinionated. This means that it may be over exaggerated for effect and comedy value. The truth may have been stretched to make a joke of it and win people's support.

I do not agree that this poster (source A) does not give any evidence about the Great Depression. It may not be reliable evidence but it does have some historical value. It presents evidence about the 'Bonus Army', the views of the Republican and Democratic Parties and the methods used by the Democratic Party to gain support.

Question 2:

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Source B was written at the time of the Depression by an American actor, Will Rogers. It is quite accurate about what was happening, he says 'We are starving to death', which was actually happening at this time. It is a primary source, written by someone with direct experience of the Depression but it cannot be completely reliable as although it is stated as fact it is actually opinion. This makes it less reliable as the author of the source may be biased or not know all of the facts. This source is particularly unreliable as an actor who may have over exaggerated to produce an effect wrote it.

Source C is a statement written by D. B. O'Callaghan, author of 'Roosevelt and the United States'. It was written in 1896, over thirty years after the Depression. This source comments less on the impact of the Depression than Source B. It talks more about the Wall Street Crash and is based more on facts than opinion. It uses other sources as evidence to support the facts, 'Economical experts have said...' and although it is a secondary source it seems quite accurate. The fact that it was written after the Depression gives it the advantage of hindsight but means it may be less accurate.

Overall I think Source C is more reliable as evidence about the impact of the Depression because it is more factual than Source B. The author of the book would have tried to make it as accurate as possible and backs up his argument with evidence.

Question 3

Source D is an artist's view of the Wall Street Crash. This tells us that it is not factual as it is a painting based on the artist's opinion and the artist is

probably trying to put across his own point of view. It was created in October 1929 (at the time of the Wall Street crash) and was probably painted by someone with direct experience of the Crash. However it is quite an abstract painting, which different people may interpret in different ways.

Source E is a set of statistics showing the changes in the price of shares of leading US companies between September and November 1929. They seem to be quite accurate as to the general change in prices but they are 'from official figures' which means their accuracy depends on the accuracy of the figures from which they are compiled. These figures could have been adjusted to support an argument, and they lack detail that may improve their reliability.

I think that Source E is more useful to a historian studying the Wall Street Crash because the statistics are more factual. There is very little factual information supplied by Source D and its usefulness could depend on the historian's interpretation of the painting. However the statistics although not completely sound are more reliable and useful as evidence because they are factual.

Question 4

Source E is from a popular song of 1932. It tells of how the protagonist thought he was 'building a dream' on the way to 'peace and glory' for his country but he is now standing in the bread line. This is a typical story of what happened to many working-class men during the Depression. They spent their lives working hard for a better life but they suffered worst during a

Depression that was not their fault. This makes the song seem accurate as this actually happened to many people. However the song may have been changed or simplified to fit a certain rhythm or rhyme and the songwriter probably had a personal point, which he wished to put across.

I think that it does give an accurate interpretation of most people's attitudes towards the Depression. Not all people would have agreed with this interpretation because they were not affected in this way. This was mainly rich people and people who had been lucky enough to keep their jobs. However I think that it does give an accurate interpretation of a great proportion of people. It is called a 'popular song', this means that a lot of people must have liked the song, probably because they found it truthful as they could relate to its message and because they were comforted to find that others were in the same position as them.

Question 5

Source A does not really give much of an idea as to who suffered more or less during the Recession. It is an election poster aimed to appeal to all people who had suffered under the Depression. Source B says that the working classes were not to blame for the Depression and that it was the rich people whose fault it was. It implies that the poor suffered more because although they were not to blame they felt the effects of it worst. Source C tells us that not enough money was 'finding its way into the hands of the workers' in the prosperity of the twenties.

This shows that the workers did not enjoy much of the wealth of this decade and as a result of this they suffered worse in the Depression because the little they had, they lost. Source D does not tell us anything about the poorer people as it does not distinguish between the rich and the poor. Source E also does not give much of idea about the suffering of the poor, as statistics do not go into enough detail to tell us this. Source F probably says the most about poor people. The person who wrote the song tells us about waiting in line for bread and begging for money.

I do not think that the poor suffered most as a result of the Great Depression because the people who were already poor did not have much to loose. If they were very poor before the Depression, the Depression had little or no effect on them. I think that the people who suffered the most were the working classes who had worked hard all their lives and earned their money. They lost the most during the Wall Street Crash, because the Rich did not loose enough to affect them and the poor lost nothing at all. Therefore I think that it was not the poor but the working classes who suffered the most because they lost what they had worked their whole lives for.