

the forgotten man a new history of the great depression

The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression explores the multifaceted impact of the Great Depression, shedding light on the experiences of individuals often overlooked in mainstream narratives. The term "forgotten man" itself refers to the average American who bore the brunt of the economic collapse, a figure who has been overshadowed by political figures and policy discussions. This article delves into the key themes, arguments, and implications presented in this significant historical work.

Understanding the Great Depression

The Great Depression, which lasted from 1929 until the late 1930s, was a period of severe economic downturn that affected millions globally. It was marked by widespread unemployment, bank failures, and drastic declines in industrial output. However, the narrative surrounding this monumental event often simplifies the complexity of its impact, primarily focusing on government responses and major political figures.

The Forgotten Man Concept

At the heart of the book is the concept of the "forgotten man." This term was popularized by economist William Graham Sumner in the late 19th century, referring to the average worker who bears the burden of policy decisions made by the elite. The author of *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* revives this concept to highlight the plight of everyday Americans during the economic crisis.

- Defining the Forgotten Man: The forgotten man is not just a passive victim of economic circumstances; he is actively engaged in the struggle for survival and dignity.
- Profiles of the Forgotten Man:
 - Farmers who lost their land to foreclosures.
 - Factory workers laid off due to reduced demand.
 - Urban dwellers facing eviction and homelessness.

Socioeconomic Factors

The Great Depression was a product of various socioeconomic factors, including the 1929 stock market crash, bank failures, and the Dust Bowl. Each of these elements contributed to the hardships faced by the forgotten man.

1. **The Stock Market Crash:** The sudden collapse of stock prices in October 1929 wiped out the savings of countless individuals.
2. **Bank Failures:** As banks collapsed, people lost their savings, which further deepened the economic crisis.
3. **Agricultural Catastrophes:** The Dust Bowl destroyed vast swaths of farmland, causing many farmers to migrate in search of work and better living conditions.

Government Response

The response of the U.S. government to the Great Depression was multifaceted, involving numerous policies and programs aimed at economic recovery. However, the effectiveness and implications of these initiatives are complex and often debated.

New Deal Programs

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal aimed to provide relief, recovery, and reform through various programs. While these initiatives were monumental in scale, their impact on the forgotten man varied.

- **Relief Programs:** Initiatives such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) employed millions, providing much-needed jobs and income.
- **Economic Recovery:** Programs like the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) sought to stabilize agricultural prices and assist struggling farmers.
- **Financial Reforms:** The establishment of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) helped restore trust in the banking system.

Criticism of Government Actions

Despite the ambitious nature of the New Deal, many argue that it failed to adequately address the needs of the forgotten man.

- **Inequality in Program Benefits:** Not all demographics benefited equally from New Deal programs. Minorities, especially African Americans, often found themselves excluded from many relief efforts.
- **Long-term Consequences:** Some critics argue that New Deal policies entrenched a reliance on government assistance rather than fostering self-sufficiency among individuals.

Experience of the Forgotten Man

The narrative of the forgotten man encompasses personal stories that illustrate the struggles faced during the Great Depression. These stories provide a human face to the statistics and policies.

Personal Accounts and Testimonies

- Diaries and Letters: Many individuals documented their experiences through letters and diaries, revealing the emotional toll of unemployment and poverty.
- Oral Histories: Interviews conducted during and after the Depression provide rich narratives that capture the resilience and determination of ordinary people.

Art and Literature During the Great Depression

The Great Depression also inspired a wealth of artistic and literary expression that reflected the struggles of the forgotten man.

- Photographs: Documentaries, such as those by Dorothea Lange, captured the stark realities of life during this era.
- Literature: Novels like John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath" brought attention to the plight of displaced farmers and the search for a better life.

The Legacy of the Great Depression

The Great Depression left an indelible mark on American society, shaping not only economic policies but also cultural attitudes toward government and individual responsibility.

Shifts in Government Philosophy

The experiences of the forgotten man during the Great Depression led to a reevaluation of the role of government in economic affairs.

- Increased Government Intervention: The crisis paved the way for a more active role of the government in regulating the economy and providing social safety nets.
- Social Security: The establishment of social security systems aimed to protect individuals in times of economic hardship.

Continuing Relevance

The lessons learned from the Great Depression and the experiences of the forgotten man remain relevant today.

- Economic Inequality: The disparities that became evident during the Great Depression continue to be a pressing issue, with discussions about wealth distribution and social justice.
- Policy Debates: Modern debates around government intervention in the economy often reference the successes and failures of the New Deal.

Conclusion

The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression serves as a crucial reminder of the human stories behind historical events. By focusing on the experiences of everyday Americans, the book challenges readers to reconsider the narratives surrounding the Great Depression. The forgotten man's struggles during this tumultuous period not only shaped the policies of the time but also laid the groundwork for ongoing discussions about economic justice and the role of government in society. Understanding this history is essential for addressing the challenges of today and ensuring that the voices of all citizens are heard in shaping the future.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression' about?

'The Forgotten Man' by Amity Shlaes offers a comprehensive analysis of the Great Depression, focusing on the untold stories of individuals who lived through the era and critiquing the government policies of the time.

Who is the author of 'The Forgotten Man' and what is her background?

Amity Shlaes is an American author and columnist known for her works on economic history. She has served as a member of the board of the U.S. National Economic Council and has a background in journalism and economics.

How does Shlaes reinterpret the role of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the Great Depression?

Shlaes argues that Roosevelt's New Deal policies, while well-intentioned, often prolonged the economic downturn and created dependency rather than

encouraging recovery, highlighting the unintended consequences of government intervention.

What is the significance of the term 'forgotten man' in the context of the book?

The 'forgotten man' refers to the ordinary citizens who were adversely affected by government policies during the Great Depression, representing the silent majority whose struggles and sacrifices are often overlooked in historical narratives.

What are some key themes explored in 'The Forgotten Man'?

Key themes include the impact of government intervention on the economy, the importance of individual resilience, and the moral implications of New Deal policies on American society.

How does Shlaes' book compare to other historical accounts of the Great Depression?

Unlike many traditional accounts that focus on the broader economic and political frameworks, Shlaes emphasizes personal stories and critiques the effectiveness of New Deal programs, providing a fresh perspective on the era.

What critiques have been made about Shlaes' interpretations in 'The Forgotten Man'?

Critics argue that Shlaes may oversimplify complex economic issues and downplay the severity of the Great Depression, as well as the positive impacts of some New Deal initiatives on recovery.

Why is 'The Forgotten Man' considered a relevant read today?

The book is relevant today as it prompts discussions about the role of government in economic crises and the balance between intervention and individual liberty, paralleling contemporary debates about fiscal policy and social welfare.

[The Forgotten Man A New History Of The Great Depression](#)

The Forgotten Man A New History Of The Great Depression

Related Articles

- [the improbable adventures of sherlock holmes](#)
- [the ghost stories of edith wharton](#)
- [the formula for computing annual straight line depreciation is](#)

[Back to Home](#)