

IT HAPPENED HERE NEW JERSEY

1936 State House Occupation

Target Age: High School
Time Period: 20th Century
Featured County: Mercer
NJ 350th Theme: Liberty



Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Common Core States Standards for English Language Arts:

R.CCR.2- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

W.CCR.2- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

SL.CCR.1- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards:

Social Studies: 6.1.12.D.9.b, 6.3.12.D.1

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: In what ways did the Great Depression threaten the liberty of those living in New Jersey?

BACKGROUND:

The stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent failure of the nation's banking industry ushered in the worst economic downturn in our nation's history. The effects were devastating throughout the country. By 1933, unemployment had reached 25% and over 5,000 banks failed. People lost their personal wealth and many became homeless. This economic collapse led to social anxiety and political instability throughout the nation and even around the world.

By 1932, with little response and worsening conditions, the people demanded action and change. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president and Democrats took control of both Houses of Congress. Within the first 100 days of his presidency, Roosevelt launched his New Deal Platform which focused on relief, recovery and reform to help bring the nation out of the Great Depression. From 1933 to 1936, the federal government passed bills, created agencies and implemented reforms all designed to bring about economic prosperity and future financial security. The United States was on a path towards

recovery and modernization in hopes of meeting the needs and demands brought forth by the twentieth century.

By 1936, New Deal programs that offered direct relief came to end and it became the responsibility of the state and local governments to address the needs of those still trying to recover from the Great Depression. Relief was minimal and inconsistent. The New Jersey Emergency Relief Administration ceased operations in April of 1936 and the needs of the people then fell to local government. On April 21, 1936, a group of citizens, known as the “Army of Unoccupation” marched into Trenton and remained in the Capitol building for the next eight days. Peacefully protesting and causing no damage, the 250 members of this “Army” simply wanted to bring attention to the dire needs of those affected by the Great Depression. Eventually, the state government would provide over six million dollars in direct relief to the citizens of New Jersey.

ACTIVITY:

After having a discussion on the effects of the Great Depression and the impact of Roosevelt’s New Deal, display the pictures of the 1936 “Army of Unoccupation” at the state capitol building in Trenton. Each student will then write their response and reactions to the images shown. The students should consider the following questions:

- Who are the people portrayed in the pictures?
- What difficulties have they experienced due to the Depression?
- What are the objectives for their protest and what methods did they utilize?
- Why would these protesters occupy the Capitol building to achieve their goals?

After allowing the students time to write, provide time for the students to work in small groups to compare their answers. Then, one member from each group will report to the class the conversations within each group.

To assist the students in the interpretation and analysis of the photographs, consider using Jon Blackwell’s article.

FOLLOW-UP:

Active participation by the citizens of a nation is vital for a thriving and vibrant democracy. It is important for elected representatives to respond and address the needs to all citizens in a democratic society.

Ask the students to consider what current issue they feel is the most important problem facing the State of New Jersey. For homework, each student will research the issue they’ve selected and write a letter to their State Senator or Assemblyperson asking for attention and action to their concern.

Students may visit the New Jersey Legislature website to identify their elected representative.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Places You Can Visit

New Jersey State Legislature Building

<http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/visitingstatehouse.asp>

The Living New Deal: Locations of New Deal Projects in New Jersey

<http://livingnewdeal.berkeley.edu/us/nj>

Additional Teaching Resources

New Jersey Digital Highway: New Jersey and the New Deal

From a project completed by New Jersey high school teachers for high school students, this excellent database of teacher resources and lesson plans focuses heavily upon primary document analysis and critical thinking skills.

http://njdh.scc-net.rutgers.edu/enj/themes/new_jersey_and_the_new_deal/

http://njdh.scc-net.rutgers.edu/enj/lessons/jersey_homesteads/

For More Information

Blackwell, Jon, "1936: An Army seizes the Capitol," *The Trentonian*.

<http://www.capitalcentury.com/1936.html>

The Great Depression in New Jersey

http://www.nj.gov/state/historical/topical_great_depression.html

The WPA Guide to 1930s New Jersey

<http://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/1743/>



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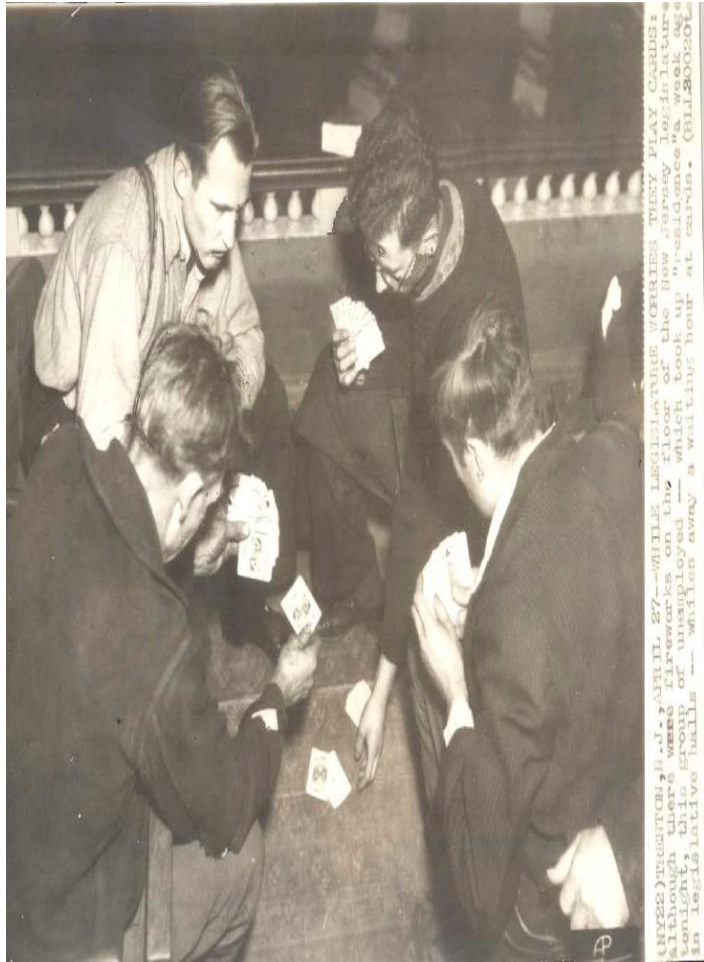
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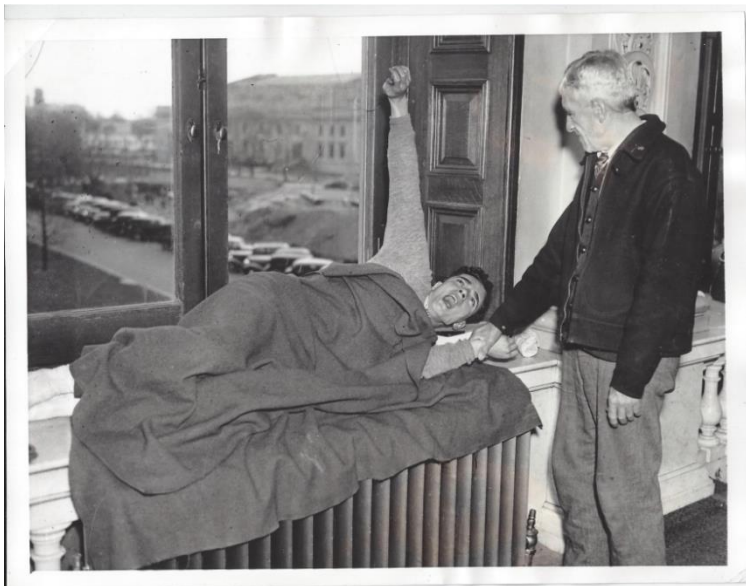
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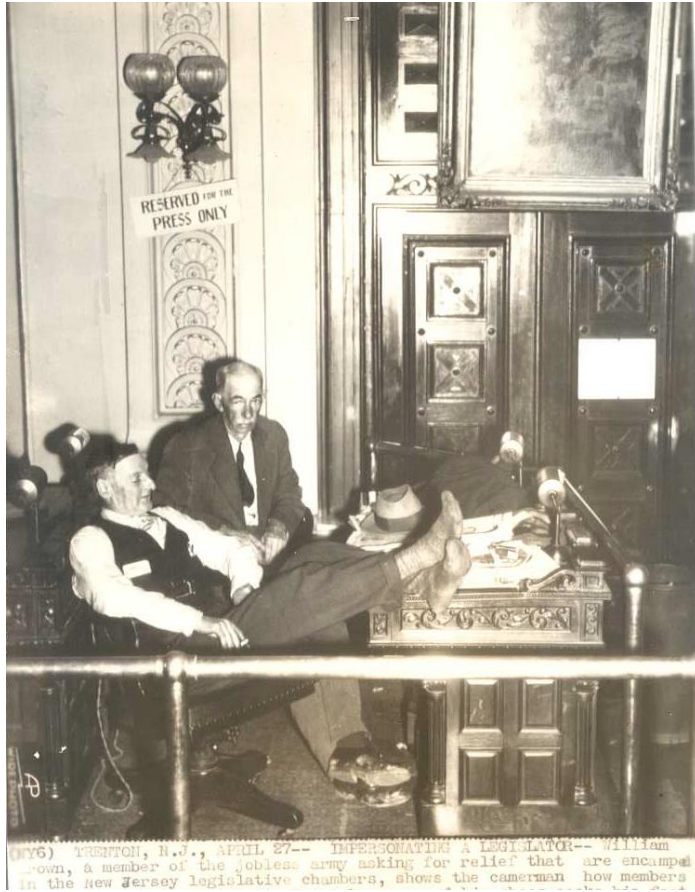
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1936) TRENTON, N.J., APRIL 27-- IMPERSONATING A LEGISLATOR-- William Brown, a member of the jobless army asking for relief that are encamped in the new Jersey legislative chambers, shows the cameraman how members

Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

CREDIT INFORMATION:

In Classroom Activity:

Pg. 1: 1936 siege children, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Pg. 3: 1936 siege children, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Pg. 4 (top): 1936 siege children asleep on stairs, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Pg. 4 (bottom): 1936 siege coffee, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Pg. 5 (top): 1926 siege sleeping man, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Pg. 5 (bottom): 1936 siege women, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Pg. 6 (top): Siege in Trenton 1936 card game, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Pg. 6 (bottom): Siege Trenton April 1936 waking up in window, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

Pg. 7: Siege Trenton 1936 feet on desk, Courtesy of Office of Legislative Services Library

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