

# PUBLIC ENEMIES in the GREAT DEPRESSION

0. PUBLIC ENEMIES in the GREAT DEPRESSION - Story Preface

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During the Great Depression, when John Dillinger was an active gangster, out-of-work people frequently traveled West. They were seeking a better life in places like California. This woman (from Arkansas) had been living in this shack (near Bakersfield, California) for three years at the time Dorothea Lange took this photo, circa 1935. Photo from the Farm Security Administration, by Dorothea Lange, now maintained at the FDR Library. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

When John Dillinger began his thirteen-month crime spree, catapulting him to the top of America's "most wanted" list, the country was enduring the <u>Great Depression</u>. Failed banks had deprived people of their life's savings, and the mood of Americans was decidedly against financial institutions.

Unemployment was <u>so high</u> that husbands, forced to leave their homes to search for work elsewhere, lived in shacks. Entire families lived in <u>make-do shelters</u>, cars, tents or <u>whatever else</u> they could pull together. Many people traveled west, on <u>bad roads</u>, seeking <u>a new life</u>.

Americans, who had helped to supply the world with food during World War One, were <u>hungry</u>. Their problem wasn't just a lack of money.

<u>Dust bowls</u>, throughout the fertile Midwest, had decimated crops. Once-productive farmland was eroding, farm houses were <u>in foreclosure</u> and farm workers (migrant or domestic) joined the legions of city workers without jobs.

Against this backdrop, Dorothea Lange traveled with her camera—capturing the <u>plight of Americans</u> who seemed to have little hope. Her photos of a migrant mother, with her children, remain among the most famous images of the time.

In 1933, when Dillinger was released from the <u>Indiana State Penitentiary</u> (in <u>Michigan City</u>)—after serving nine years (of a ten-to-twenty-year sentence) for the botched robbery of a grocer—the U.S. economy was at its Depression-Era low. Dillinger, embittered by his long sentence, had a plan. He wanted to free his friends—bank robbers, like Harry Pierpont—who were still behind bars.

Bank robberies, committed by people dubbed "yeggmen" (or "yeggs") by the press, were becoming a serious problem during "The Great Crime Wave" of 1933 and '34. It wasn't just hard times which caused men like Pretty Boy Floyd and Baby Face Nelson to consistently relieve banks of other people's money. Technology was on the side of the criminals.

Thompson submachine guns fired 800 bullets-a-minute, but they were only part of a gangster's arsenal. Getaway cars with new and reliable V-8 engines—a vastly different travel experience from that of unemployed people forced to walk or <u>use horses</u> to pull their out-of-gas vehicles—were key components of crime scenes.

Clyde Barrow and Bonnie Parker also relied on fast cars to keep ahead of "the law." Sometimes Barrow drove between 500-1,000 miles a day as he eluded capture. Big guns, fast cars and relentless travel were the marks of their gang ... until the day when a waiting posse claimed the lives of Bonnie and Clyde. Their car ended-up with <u>167 bullet holes</u>.

Guns and cars of law-enforcement officials were usually no match for those of Depression-Era gangsters. How could public funds support crime-fighters when the country's economic downturn was mired at near-bottom

#### levels?

### Those facts favored John Dillinger and his friends-at least for awhile.

# See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/PUBLIC-ENEMIES-in-the-GREAT-DEPRESSION-Public-Enemies

### See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/PUBLIC-ENEMIES-in-the-GREAT-DEPRESSION-Public-Enemies

# Media Stream



#### **Unemployed During Great Depression**

Photo of out-of-work people in New Jersey, now mantained at the FDR Library. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Unemployed-During-Great-Depression



### Depression-Era Shacks

Photo from the Farm Security Administration, by Dorothea Lange, now maintained at the FDR Library. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Depression-Era-Shacks</u>



<u>Depression-Era Shelters</u> Photo of migrant family, circa 1935, maintained at the FDR Library. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Depression-Era-Shelters



### Escaping the Great Depression

Photo, circa 1935, maintained at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. Online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. View this asset at: <u>http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Escaping-the-Great-Depression</u>



#### **Depression-Era Families**

Photo from the Farm Security Administration-Resettlement Administration, now maintained at the FDR Library. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Depression-Era-Families



# Food Relief During the Great Depression

Photo, of New York City breadline, was taken circa February, 1932. It is now maintained at the FDR Library. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Food-Relief-During-the-Great-Depression



### Black Blizzards - Depression-Era Dust Bowls

Photo, taken in 1934, depicts "One of South Dakota's Black Blizzards." Online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Black-Blizzards-Depression-Era-Dust-Bowls



### Farm Foreclosures - Depression Era

Photo maintained at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library - online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Farm-Foreclosures-Depression-Era



# John Dillinger - Michigan City Prison

Image online, courtesy Michigan City Public Library.

The library provides this description of the prison: "Built by 150 convicts, Indiana State Prison North was completed in 1868. It quickly became a Michigan City point of interest. One of the city's three streetcar lines ran to the prison entrance and tours of the facility were popular with excursionists. Many bought picture postcards showing the convicts in their striped uniforms."

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-Dillinger-Michigan-City-Prison



#### **Bennett Buggies - Horses Pull Cars** Image online, courtesy Library and Archives Canada / C-000623. View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Bennett-Buggies-Horses-Pull-Cars



### Bonnie and Clyde - Death Car

Newsreel video clip of the Barrow-Parker ambush scene - May 23, 1934 - online, courtesy U.S. National Archives. View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Bonnie-and-Clyde-Death-Car