

Unknown Photographer. (1932). *Breadline of New Yorkers*. FDR Presidential Library and Museum, Photos of the Great Depression and the New Deal. [https://www.fdrlibrary.org/documents/356632/390886/teachable\\_greatdepression.pdf/5424874c-77c1-4f55-b819-4babee7b9b9a](https://www.fdrlibrary.org/documents/356632/390886/teachable_greatdepression.pdf/5424874c-77c1-4f55-b819-4babee7b9b9a)



Unknown photographer. (1932). *Breadline of New Yorkers*.<sup>1</sup>



### SOURCE<sup>2</sup>

**a. Name the photo's date, title, and creator:** 1932, *Breadline of New Yorkers*  
**b. Guess what type of person might have taken this picture and for what purpose:** It seems to be rather unbalanced and random, without anyone looking directly (or indirectly) at the camera  
**c. Guess was it personal or published, candid or posed, amateur or professional:** Published, candid, and amateur.

### CONTEXT

**d. What do you see in the photo, (details, people, action, surroundings, etc.):** A very long line of men waiting a self-serve soup meal... All of the men are very well dressed, many wearing hats... There are no women or minorities in the line... The man behind the table, in the position of helping serve the soup, is wearing a long black robe-like outfit with a white collar... The line of men flows downstairs into a building labeled "St. Peter's Mission"... The men in line are getting a bowl of soup from canisters that look to be worn, old and well-used  
**e. Next, what you think is happening in the photograph. Support the response:** The men are unemployed and getting a free meal from the Church. The name of the mission, St. Peter's, and the traditional everyday wardrobe of the server--the cassock--suggest the church is Catholic (maybe Episcopal, Anglican, or Eastern Orthodox)  
**f. Consider how this image serves as a record of the Depression Era:** Many Americans lost their savings in bank failures and nearly a third of workers were unemployed (millions more worked only part-time at terribly low wages)<sup>3</sup>... Having lost their savings and their jobs, people from all walks of life were homeless, hungry, and without hope of finding work... People turned to community soup kitchens and local shelters for meals and a warm place to live. Before this depression era the only formal "community relief agencies" to offer public assistance were charitable organizations, such as the American Red Cross and religious institutions, such as churches... Catholic Charities in New York "became a crucial provider of emergency meals, financial assistance and expanded programs" for some of the most vulnerable people in society--homeless children, the elderly, people who were sick<sup>4</sup>... Most big cities did not have public relief programs and their spontaneous efforts were usually inadequate... Nearly 1,000 families a day were losing their homes and breaking apart with parents sending

their children to live with far-away, better-off relatives or to orphanages to be fed<sup>5</sup>  
**g. What is the overall message:** While help was offered and accepted by many, much more help was needed – especially in larger cities... Landlords everywhere evicted families unable to pay their rent... Many families lived in crowded, unheated tenement apartments with other families to save money... Others resorted to sleeping in doorways or on park benches<sup>6</sup>... It may be suggested that the financial crisis and associated social problems needed federal attempts at a "rescue" from the Great Depression... Something needed to be done to help these people, and quickly  
**h. What specific details support...thoughts:** The well-dressed New-Yorkers appear very humble as well as hungry. Hats in hands and seemingly asking permission (specifically the man in the center) for a bowl of soup... The faces of the men shown in line are hardened, saddened, and hopeless. It also appears that the two large canisters will not be enough to feed the entire line--will the men then be left without, or is there more inside the mission? While women's participation in the workforce had increased over the past decade<sup>7</sup>, they are not represented (nor are their burdens) in this photo.

### CORROBORATE/THINK DEEPLY

**i. How does it relate to other photos (evidence)? j. Which others agree? Disagree:** *Migrant* is similar in that it also portrays devastating effects of the depression, however, *Breadline* is in an urban setting with very well dressed men... *Bonus March* and *TVA* depict crowds linked to secular, government interventions while *Breadline* shows religious, private efforts  
**k. Why might other photos support/refute this one:** The purpose of this photo seems to be to display the effects of the depression and one attempted remedy, other photos concentrate on causes  
**l. What does this photo suggest about the topic-specific question?** This is a private, religious effort to help those who were hungry and miserable and in need of help to survive  
**m. What else do I need to know:** How was the photo used--by the church to advertise, or evangelize? To illustrate an article?  
**n. What questions does this photo raise in my mind:** Why are minorities, women and children not in this photo? Were they allowed to receive help from this mission? Was there a separate mission for minorities, women, and children? Were these men expected to attend Mass (religious service) in order to receive food?

### CITATIONS

<sup>1</sup> Unknown. (1932). *Breadline of New Yorkers* (Photograph). Retrieved June, 2005, from FDR Presidential Library and Museum, Photos of the Great Depression and the New Deal  
<sup>2</sup> Source, Context, and Corroborate/Think Deeply historical thinking steps suggested in: Wineburg, S. (1999). Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(7), 488-500  
<sup>3</sup> Zinn, H. (2003). *A People's History of the United States, 1492-present*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial, p. 387  
<sup>4</sup> <http://www.catholiccharitiesny.org/about-us/history/the-great-depression-and-world-war-ii/>  
<sup>5</sup> Hart, D. (2002). *History Alive! U.S. History*: Teachers Curriculum Institute, p. 407  
<sup>6</sup> Hart, D. (2002). *History Alive! U.S. History*: Teachers Curriculum Institute, p. 409  
<sup>7</sup> DuBois, E. C., & Dumenil, L. (2005). *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents*. New York, NY: Bedford/St.Martin's