When Trust Faltered

Economic strain and public confidence in the 1970s

9-12.US2.36 "Evaluate the causes and impacts on public confidence and trust in the government's ability to solve economic and social problems, such as: • Deindustrialization • Urban decline • Migration • Stagflation • Deficit spending • Energy crisis •..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two economic or social problems, circle two government actions or limits, and number two places where the text explains why public trust might change.

Why Solutions Seemed Out of Reach

1 In 1973, an Arab oil embargo helped send U.S. gasoline prices upward. Drivers waited in long lines at stations, and many households paid more to heat their homes. Higher energy costs also raised the cost of making and moving goods. During the 1970s, Americans faced stagflation, high inflation alongside weak growth and unemployment. Since federal leaders could not quickly lower prices or create jobs, some people questioned whether Washington could manage an economy shaken partly by events overseas.

2 In Detroit, another slow-moving crisis sharpened those doubts. Automakers faced foreign competition, and factories adopted machines that required fewer workers; some plants closed or shifted production. Lost jobs pushed some families to move away, while decades of suburban migration had already reduced the city's tax base. With less revenue, officials struggled to maintain services. Racial discrimination in housing and hiring had limited opportunities for many Black residents. When promises of fair treatment met visible inequality, distrust could deepen even among people who disagreed about its causes.

3 Federal officials tried different responses. Congress set fuel-efficiency standards in 1975, but new cars took years to replace older ones. In the early 1980s, tax cuts and higher defense spending helped widen federal deficits. Some voters viewed borrowing as a way to support priorities during hard times; others feared interest payments would limit funds for future needs. A driver seeing no quick relief at the pump might doubt government competence, while someone expecting long-term fuel savings might judge the same policy more favorably.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might the oil crisis have weakened trust in federal leaders even though events overseas helped cause it?

2. How could factory job losses and migration make Detroit residents doubt local government's ability to solve problems?

3. Why might people judge the 1975 fuel-efficiency standards differently?

4. How could growing federal deficits lead to opposing views of government's ability to meet people's needs?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence letter to a Detroit newspaper in 1981. Rank two problems from the passage by how strongly they could weaken trust in government, support your ranking with evidence, and give one reason a neighbor might disagree.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.US2.36

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two economic or social problems, circle two government actions or limits, and number two places where the text explains why public trust might change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might the oil crisis have weakened trust in federal leaders even though events overseas helped cause it?	**Gas prices rose and drivers faced long lines, but federal leaders could not provide quick relief.**
2	How could factory job losses and migration make Detroit residents doubt local government's ability to solve problems?	**As families left, the tax base shrank, leaving officials less revenue to maintain services.**
3	Why might people judge the 1975 fuel-efficiency standards differently?	**Some might expect long-term fuel savings, while others might lose confidence because the standards brought no quick relief.**
4	How could growing federal deficits lead to opposing views of government's ability to meet people's needs?	**Some saw borrowing as support for current priorities; others feared interest payments would leave less money for future needs.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I think Detroit's factory job losses did more to weaken trust in government than the energy crisis. Lost work could force families to leave and shrink the city's tax base, making reliable services harder to provide. Gas lines and higher prices also made federal leaders look unable to protect households from shocks abroad. Still, a neighbor who spent hours waiting for gasoline might rank the energy crisis first because its effects were immediate. Both problems made government promises difficult to believe, but Detroit's shrinking tax base could damage daily life for years.

Accept different rankings if the student explains how each problem could affect trust, uses accurate passage evidence, and gives a plausible reason for disagreement.