

Publisher's Note

Defining Documents in American History series, produced by Salem Press, consists of a collection of essays on important historical documents by a diverse range of writers on a broad range of subjects in American history. *Defining Documents in American History: 1930s* surveys key documents produced from 1930-1939, organized under six broad categories:

- Setting Up the New Deal
- Unemployment and Relief
- Women, Minorities, and Youth
- The Bonus army
- Foreign Policy
- Culture, Crime, and More

Historical documents provide a compelling view of this unique period of American history. Designed for high school and college students, the aim of the series is to advance historical document studies as an important activity in learning about history.

Essay Format

1930s contains 50 primary source documents – many in their entirety. Each document is supported by a critical essay, written by historians and teachers, that includes a Summary Overview, Defining Moment, Author Biography, Document Analysis, and Essential Themes. Readers will appreciate the diversity of the collected texts, including journals, letters, speeches, political sermons, laws, government reports, and court cases, among other genres. An important feature of each essays is a close reading of the primary source that develops evi-

dence of broader themes, such as author's rhetorical purpose, social or class position, point of view, and other relevant issues. In addition, essays are organized by section themes, listed above, highlighting major issues of the period, many of which extend across eras and continue to shape American life. Each section begins with a brief introduction that defines questions and problems underlying the subjects in the historical documents. A brief glossary included at the end of each document highlights keywords important in the study of the primary source. Each essay also includes a Bibliography and Additional Reading section for further research.

Appendixes

- **Chronological List** arranges all documents by year.
- **Web Resources** is an annotated list of web sites that offer valuable supplemental resources.
- **Bibliography** lists helpful articles and books for further study.

Contributors

Salem Press would like to extend its appreciation to all involved in the development and production of this work. The essays have been written and signed by scholars of history, humanities, and other disciplines related to the essay's topics. Without these expert contributions, a project of this nature would not be possible. A full list of contributor's names and affiliations appears in the front matter of this volume.

Editor's Introduction

The 1930s are forever associated with two things: the Great Depression and the New Deal. That Franklin D. Roosevelt led the nation for most of the decade (and beyond) makes him a good candidate for being counted as a third major force or icon of the era.

The decade began, however, with Herbert Hoover in the White House. While the disastrous crash of the stock market in 1929 was not the result of any one party's or individual's policies or actions, Hoover became the fall guy for the crash and all that came after it. Hoover and his Republican predecessor in the White House, Calvin Coolidge, strongly believed in keeping government out of the way of business, so that when the crash did come Hoover's response was to regard it as a transient phenomenon that the next business cycle would correct. All that was needed, he felt, was to make some adjustments involving foreign credits and to get the wheels of volunteerism going in order to provide relief at the local level. Together with Congress, the administration set up the Reconstruction Finance Corporation in January 1932 to make government loans to financial institutions, large industries, railroads, and public works projects. Given the scale of the problem, and its human dimension, the response was clearly inadequate, and Hoover was seen as being blind to the plight of millions of suffering Americans.

Adding to Hoover's woes was another matter he inherited from the decade before. Veterans of World War I had advocated for, and received promises regarding, the payment of war bonuses. Although technically the payments had been authorized to begin in 1945, tens of thousands of unemployed veterans saw the matter differently and demanded the immediate payment of their bonuses. Thus, in the summer of 1932, a presidential election year, some 12,000 veterans and their families marched and set up make-shift camps in the capital. Under pressure to pay, but fearing its effects on the US Treasury, Congress moved a Bonus Bill through the House of Representatives but failed to get it past the Senate. Many of the former soldiers in the ragtag "Bonus Army," as the protesters were called, departed on news of the bill's demise, but many others stayed behind. In July, Hoover authorized Army troops under General Douglas MacArthur to clear the camps and restore order. The scene played badly in newspapers and on the radio and did nothing to endear Hoover to voters in the upcoming election. He was easily defeated in the

fall by his Democratic opponent, New York governor Franklin D. Roosevelt.

A New Deal for Americans

The New Deal of the Roosevelt era was a massive, complicated reform effort designed to save the nation from near collapse. Parts of the enterprise were reasonably successful, while other parts generally were not. It helped put people to work and provided a sense of recovery, but never was there anything like the prosperity that had been enjoyed in the previous decade. Virtually everything about the New Deal was controversial, beginning with the very idea that the government should be responsible for economic salvation and social welfare. In the United States, these had traditionally been left to the individual states or to the private sector—or so critics of the New Deal proclaimed. Roosevelt and his "Brain Trust" of New Dealers (i.e., a group of bright minds who advised the president and carried out the administration's policies) countered that government had long been involved in creating programs, regulating the economy, and seeing to the health and welfare of the nation's citizens. They argued that it was the 1920s, with its *laissez-faire* attitude, that had got the country into the mess it was now in, and there was no reason to go back and repeat the calamity.

Looked at from a distance, the New Deal reflects the traditional American balance between government involvement and independent initiative, albeit with the scales tilted in the direction of the political left. It was anything but the wholesale Soviet-style social engineering experiment that its harshest critics claimed it to be. It sought to tackle the problem of the Depression by a variety of means, focusing on the delivery of immediate relief to individuals, the provision of financial supports for business groups and farmers, the stimulation of the economy overall, and the establishment of a basis for the long-term security of all citizens.

The New Deal is also remembered for having created an "alphabet soup" of new government agencies and programs, each with its own abbreviation or acronym. Here is a partial listing:

Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA)

Created in May 1933 based on an earlier program under the Hoover administration, FERA disbursed federal funds to states and localities in the form of grants and

loans. The monies were to be used for relief programs and job creation. FERA ceased operating in 1935, replaced by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA).

National Recovery Administration (NRA)

Established in June 1933, the NRA set up specialized codes, or regulations, meant to ensure fair competition in industry. The codes specified wages, prices, and production levels, chiefly with respect to the operations of large firms. Small-business owners, farmers, and labor leaders complained that the codes were harmful to their interests, and consumers didn't much appreciate the NRA pricing system. Neither were many people put to work or the economy improved as a result of NRA activities. In 1935 the US Supreme Court ruled, in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, that the NRA was unconstitutional; it was shut down in January 1936.

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

The CCC, which was created around the same time as FERA and NRA, employed millions of young men in conservation projects such as park creation, reforestation, land reclamation, forest management, fire fighting, and erosion control. The workers lived in camps and were paid wages, most of which were expected to go to their families. The CCC closed operations in 1942.

Public Works Administration (PWA)

Not to be confused with the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the PWA built large-scale public works such as dams, tunnels, bridges, schools, hospitals, public buildings, and sewer systems. It was headed by Interior Secretary Harold Ickes and operated between 1933 and 1943.

Civil Works Administration (CWA)

The CWA, headed by top Roosevelt advisor Harry Hopkins, operated between 1933 and 1934, during which time it put men to work improving or erecting buildings and grounds, laying roads, building schools, and constructing airports.

Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA)

Between 1933 and 1935 the AAA sought to regulate farm production, mainly by paying farmers not to grow certain crops and destroy them if they had grown them.

The idea was to reduce production levels in order to force a rise in prices and help restart the agricultural sector. Subsidies were also provided for key commodities. The scheme was declared unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in 1935.

Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)

The TVA, created in May 1933, was a regional development project designed to bring hydroelectric power to seven southern states and improve river navigation, introduce modern flood control, optimize land usage, and stimulate economic development. Thousands of people were put to work as a result. TVA still exists today, although there is more private-sector involvement. The original experiment was never replicated owing to opposition by private power companies.

Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)

Established in 1934 and remaining in operation today, the SEC was charged with policing the market in stocks and bonds (i.e., securities) to end misleading practices and price manipulations. The intent was to restore investor confidence in a damaged institution and get the financial markets moving again. Its first chairman was Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., father of John F. Kennedy. The *Glass-Steagall Act of 1933* imposed a barrier between commercial lending banks and investment firms. The act was repealed in 1999, and some commentators have argued that the repeal contributed to the financial collapse of 2007-2009.

Works Progress Administration (WPA)

Headed by Harry Hopkins, the WPA operated between 1935 and 1943. (It was renamed the Work Projects Administration in 1939.) Like the CWA, the WPA was focused on small- and medium-scale construction projects such as roads, bridges, parks, schools, libraries, sporting grounds, swimming pools, gyms, city halls, courthouses, post offices, sidewalks, and waterworks. As many as 8 million people worked for the WPA, 3 million at any given time. Besides planners, project managers, and laborers, the program employed artists and writers under the auspices of the Federal Arts Project.

National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)

Created in 1935 and still operating today, the NLRB was charged with ensuring workers' right to organize, bargain collectively, and go on strike. It basically moni-

tors employers' labor practices to make sure they are fair according to the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) of 1935 and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, among other laws.

Social Security Administration (SSA)

Originally the Social Security Board, this agency was created as part of the Social Security Act of 1935. The act set up an old-age pension system and a temporary unemployment benefits program. Later, it was expanded to include dependents and the disabled. Since its inception, Social Security has become a mainstay of American society and has served hundreds of millions of citizens, most of whom contribute to it through paycheck withholdings.

National Youth Administration (NYA)

Existing between 1935 and 1943, the NYA distributed funds to high schools and colleges for the employment of youth on a part-time basis. Young people not attending school were provided with vocational training.

Government, Politics, and World Affairs

The types of actions taken by the Roosevelt administration in the 1930s defined the role of government in American society for much of the rest of the century—and beyond. The New Dealers strove to stimulate and regulate the economy, keep the job market going, provide welfare for those in need, undertake public works and infrastructure projects, oversee consumer affairs, monitor financial institutions, guard the interests of workers, and facilitate prosperity overall. Not that they always were successful or satisfied all parties involved, but they did change the nature of the dialogue. No longer was it a question, after the New Deal, *whether* government should play a role in managing the economy and promoting social good, but rather *how* it should achieve those goals. (One exception here is the 1980s, when, under President Ronald Reagan, there was a great pullback by government from social and economic affairs.)

Politically, the era increased divisions between the Republican and Democratic parties, as Democrats increasingly became the party of Roosevelt—with all that that meant—and Republicans increasingly became the party of Conservatism and anti-Communism. Roosevelt was swept into power in 1932, enjoyed a landslide victory in 1936, and was reelected for a third time in 1940, all the while bringing along more Democrats to

fill Congress and state legislatures. In that respect, the New Deal was immensely popular and the Democratic Party came to be seen as upholding the interests of the “common man.” Somewhat surprisingly, however, the party also found support among business groups associated with mass consumption, such as retailers, investment firms, building contractors, and various service industries (including legal services). These groups, along with labor unions and farmers, formed the backbone of the Democratic party. Southern Democrats supported the New Deal on the condition that it not delve into the areas of race relations and civil rights.

Republicans, meanwhile, opposed the Administration's progressive legislation at every turn. The greatest evidence of this was at the Supreme Court, where conservative justices blocked several key measures. So frustrated was the president after these reversals that he launched a misguided effort to rewrite the rules and “pack” the Court with liberal justices—an effort that blew up and turned some within his own circle against him. Republicans in Congress were also on the attack. In the House of Representatives, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigated alleged disloyalty and subversive activities among government employees and private citizens, particularly those with supposed communist ties. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Federal Arts Project were among the main targets. The committee uncovered little if anything of substance but did manage to damage the reputations of many of the people it looked at.

The 1930s also saw a shift in foreign policy away from internationalism and toward isolationism. Early in his tenure as president, Roosevelt announced a retreat from intervention as a policy and the beginning of a “Good Neighbor Policy” toward Latin America. Fueling the dislike for him among conservatives, he also recognized the Soviet Union and removed trade barriers between the United States and a number of other nations. By the time Japan invaded China in 1937, the mood in the United States was one of “wait and see.” The response was repeated when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, launching World War II. Not until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 did attitudes finally change and the United States enter the war against Germany and Japan. With that, a new era began—even while the legacy of the New Deal lived on.

Michael Shally-Jensen, PhD

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■ President Roosevelt: Fireside Chat on “The Forgotten Man”

Date: April 7, 1932

Author: Franklin D. Roosevelt

Genre: speech

Summary Overview

In 1932, New York governor and presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered a radio address to the American people regarding the economic crisis. Following the stock market crash in 1929, the Great Depression hit the United States, leading to widespread unemployment, home and farm foreclosures, and financial loss. In his address, Roosevelt stated that any permanent solution must be built from the “bottom up,” and he outlined three steps he believed were necessary to secure economic recovery: first, purchasing power had to be restored to American farmers; second, the federal government had to provide financial relief to small banks in order to prevent further foreclosures; and third, tariff policies had to be revised to ensure that the United States could sell its excess consumer goods on the global market.

Defining Moment

The United States experienced an economic boom during the 1920s. Europe had suffered significant infrastructure damage during World War I, placing the United States in a relatively strong financial position with its abundant raw materials and available investment funds. Technological developments such as mass-production assembly lines allowed more goods to be manufactured quickly and cheaply. Newly imposed import tariffs encouraged citizens to buy American-made goods, and favorable tax laws encouraged businessmen to invest in the manufacturing sector.

This changed abruptly on October 24, 1929, when the US stock market began a rapid, steady decline. By the following week, panic was in full swing as stock prices across all economic sectors plummeted. Banks of all sizes were in danger of closing their doors, and many demanded immediate repayment of loans and

mortgages in an attempt to save their businesses. However, few borrowers—either personal or corporate—had cash available for immediate repayment. By November 1929, the value of the stock market decreased by \$30 billion; many companies closed, leading to widespread unemployment.

By the end of the 1920s, numerous countries around the world with free-market economies experienced similar financial decline. Some were hit harder than others, and the situation was especially dire in the United States. By 1932, the stock market had dropped to about 20 percent of its 1929 value. By the time the Great Depression reached its official peak in 1933, 25 percent of workers were unemployed, and thousands of US banks had collapsed. The increased unemployment led to decreased spending and lower demand for consumer goods, which led to fewer manufacturing jobs and ultimately even more unemployment. The failure of so many banks—including many large ones—led to further foreclosures and restricted access to the credit many believed was necessary to boost the depressed economy.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1929 crash, President Herbert Hoover and his administration established or expanded several government programs designed to help destitute Americans. However, the public criticized his approach as spending too heavily on corporate subsidies while ordinary Americans literally starved. For example, Hoover established the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which lent \$2 billion in government funds to banks, insurance companies, building and loan associations, agricultural credit organizations, and railroads. By contrast, Hoover declined to support a bill that would have provided additional payments to World War I veterans for their time in the service, claiming the \$4 billion price tag

was too high.

By 1932, Roosevelt, then the New York state governor, was campaigning in earnest to become the next president of the United States. His platform focused on establishing federal programs designed to provide immediate relief to the starving and homeless and to put Americans back to work through government-funded works projects such as environmental conservation initiatives and improvements to government buildings and other public infrastructure.

Author Biography

Franklin D. Roosevelt was born on January 30, 1882, in Hyde Park, New York. He attended Groton School in Massachusetts and received his bachelor's degree in history from Harvard University. He studied law at

Columbia University in New York, but, upon passing the bar examination, left school without completing his degree in 1907. He practiced law in New York City for three years, before being elected to the New York State Senate in 1910.

President Woodrow Wilson appointed Roosevelt assistant secretary of the Navy from 1913 until 1920. Following an unsuccessful run for US vice president as the running mate of James M. Cox, Roosevelt briefly withdrew from politics. After a partial recovery from polio he contracted in 1921, Roosevelt was elected governor of New York State in 1928. In 1932, Roosevelt was elected president of the United States. He was inaugurated during the height of the Great Depression and saw the country through World War II. He died while still in office on April 12, 1945.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

Although I understand that I am talking under the auspices of the Democratic National Committee, I do not want to limit myself to politics. I do not want to feel that I am addressing an audience of Democrats or that I speak merely as a Democrat myself. The present condition of our national affairs is too serious to be viewed through partisan eyes for partisan purposes.

Fifteen years ago my public duty called me to an active part in a great national emergency, the World War. Success then was due to a leadership whose vision carried beyond the timorous and futile gesture of sending a tiny army of 150,000 trained soldiers and the regular navy to the aid of our allies. The generalship of that moment conceived of a whole Nation mobilized for war, economic, industrial, social and military resources gathered into a vast unit capable of and actually in the process of throwing into the scales ten million men equipped with physical needs and sustained by the realization that behind them were the united efforts of 110,000,000 human beings. It was a great plan because it was built from bottom to top and not from top to bottom.

In my calm judgment, the Nation faces today a more grave emergency than in 1917.

It is said that Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo because he forgot his infantry—he staked too much upon the more spectacular but less substantial cavalry.

The present administration in Washington provides a close parallel. It has either forgotten or it does not want to remember the infantry of our economic army.

These unhappy times call for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized but the indispensable units of economic power, for plans like those of 1917 that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid.

Obviously, these few minutes tonight permit no opportunity to lay down the ten or a dozen closely related objectives of a plan to meet our present emergency, but I can draw a few essentials, a beginning in fact, of a planned program.

It is the habit of the unthinking to turn in times like this to the illusions of economic magic. People suggest that a huge expenditure of public funds by the Federal Government and by State and local governments will completely solve the unemployment problem. But it is clear that even if we could raise many billions of dollars and find definitely useful public works to spend these billions on, even all that money would not give employment to the seven million or ten million people who are out of work. Let us admit frankly that it would be only a stopgap. A real economic cure must go to the killing of the bacteria in the system rather than to the treatment of

external symptoms.

How much do the shallow thinkers realize, for example, that approximately one-half of our whole population, fifty or sixty million people, earn their living by farming or in small towns whose existence immediately depends on farms. They have today lost their purchasing power. Why? They are receiving for farm products less than the cost to them of growing these farm products. The result of this loss of purchasing power is that many other millions of people engaged in industry in the cities cannot sell industrial products to the farming half of the Nation. This brings home to every city worker that his own employment is directly tied up with the farmer's dollar. No Nation can long endure half bankrupt. Main Street, Broadway, the mills, the mines will close if half the buyers are broke.

I cannot escape the conclusion that one of the essential parts of a national program of restoration must be to restore purchasing power to the farming half of the country. Without this the wheels of railroads and of factories will not turn.

Closely associated with this first objective is the problem of keeping the home-owner and the farm-owner where he is, without being dispossessed through the foreclosure of his mortgage. His relationship to the great banks of Chicago and New York is pretty remote. The two billion dollar fund which President Hoover and the Congress have put at the disposal of the big banks, the railroads and the corporations of the Nation is not for him.

His is a relationship to his little local bank or local loan company. It is a sad fact that even though the local lender in many cases does not want to evict the farmer or home-owner by foreclosure proceedings, he is forced to do so in order to keep his bank or company solvent. Here should be an objective of Government itself, to provide at least as much assistance to the little fellow as it is now giving to the large banks and corporations. That is another example of building from the bottom up.

One other objective closely related to the problem of selling American products is to provide a tariff policy

based upon economic common sense rather than upon politics, hot-air, and pull. This country during the past few years, culminating with the Hawley-Smoot Tariff in 1929, has compelled the world to build tariff fences so high that world trade is decreasing to the vanishing point. The value of goods internationally exchanged is today less than half of what it was three or four years ago.

Every man and woman who gives any thought to the subject knows that if our factories run even 80 percent of capacity, they will turn out more products than we as a Nation can possibly use ourselves. The answer is that if they run on 80 percent of capacity, we must sell some goods abroad. How can we do that if the outside Nations cannot pay us in cash? And we know by sad experience that they cannot do that. The only way they can pay us is in their own goods or raw materials, but this foolish tariff of ours makes that impossible.

What we must do is this: revise our tariff on the basis of a reciprocal exchange of goods, allowing other Nations to buy and to pay for our goods by sending us such of their goods as will not seriously throw any of our industries out of balance, and incidentally making impossible in this country the continuance of pure monopolies which cause us to pay excessive prices for many of the necessities of life.

Such objectives as these three, restoring farmers' buying power, relief to the small banks and home-owners and a reconstructed tariff policy, are only a part of ten or a dozen vital factors. But they seem to be beyond the concern of a national administration which can think in terms only of the top of the social and economic structure. It has sought temporary relief from the top down rather than permanent relief from the bottom up. It has totally failed to plan ahead in a comprehensive way. It has waited until something has cracked and then at the last moment has sought to prevent total collapse.

It is high time to get back to fundamentals. It is high time to admit with courage that we are in the midst of an emergency at least equal to that of war. Let us mobilize to meet it.

Document Analysis

Roosevelt begins his radio address by recounting the Allied forces' success in World War I. He observes that success came from a "bottom-up" approach that rallied support, from not only trained military personnel, but also from more than 100 million ordinary people across the globe. He offers this story to demonstrate his position that building from the "bottom up" is the best approach to resolving the economic crisis.

Many factors contributed to the Great Depression, but Roosevelt says the main cause is relatively straightforward: Farmers—nearly half of the country's population—lost a significant amount of purchasing power when prices dropped because of overproduction. Because of this loss, families could no longer afford to purchase manufactured goods, which led to job loss in the industrial sectors. In turn, this further eroded the purchasing power of the American public and created a cycle of economic loss.

Roosevelt believes that the country must once again use a bottom-up approach in order to improve the economy. He says that large expenditures of public funds for creating government works-related jobs are only a stopgap measure, and it is necessary to address the root of the problem. The federal government must provide financial assistance to smaller banks to help them maintain solvency and prevent them from foreclosing on houses and farms. Additionally, the 1930 Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act compounds the overproduction problem: with the decline of the American consumer's purchasing power, too many excess goods exist in the domestic market, thus driving down prices. But with the high tariff rates and the prohibition on international exchange of goods in favor of cash-only transactions, companies have no viable way of selling these excesses on the global market.

Roosevelt concludes by identifying three steps necessary to bring the economy back into balance: farmers' purchasing power must be restored; the federal government must provide financial relief to small banks and homeowners; and the tariff policy must be revised to give American goods an outlet in the global market. Roosevelt closes by saying that "it is high time to get back to fundamentals," and encourages the American public to mobilize to meet the challenges presented by the state of the economy.

Essential Themes

A significant theme throughout Roosevelt's campaign and presidency was his attention to the plight of everyday Americans. Many believe that his bottom-up approach to economic recovery was a major contributing factor to his victory over Herbert Hoover in the 1932 election. Contrary to Hoover's approach, Roosevelt believed that first restoring financial security to the farmers and workers would lead to increased spending and ultimately strengthen corporate financial positions.

Additionally, Roosevelt frequently addressed the impact of global trade barriers on the domestic economy. He explained how the European and US economies were interconnected, especially in light of American investments in Europe's post-World War I rebuilding efforts. As economies softened across the globe in the early 1930s, the United States and many other countries enacted or raised tariffs to protect their domestic production from global competition. But the combination of overproduction and high export barriers created a surplus of goods that drove down prices across the manufacturing sector, thus decreasing the purchasing power of both industrial workers and farmers. Restoring a proper balance of international trade, Roosevelt believed, was another key factor to economic recovery.

Despite Roosevelt's new ideas and significant financial investment from the federal government, recovery from the Great Depression was slow. The economy showed signs of improving in 1933, but it stalled during 1934 and 1935 before picking up again between 1935 and 1937. A second wave of economic depression hit in 1937, however, from which the United States did not fully recover until entering World War II in 1941.

—Tracey M. DiLascio, JD

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