

The Great Depression & Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal: Ten Political Cartoons (1930s)

In response to an array of contributing factors which had developed in chorus over the past several years, the Stock Market crashed on October 29, 1929, plunging the United States into severe economic depression unparalleled in history. The fiscal irresponsibility of the 1920s had come to fruition. President Herbert Hoover (and Secretary of Treasury Andrew Mellon) counseled voluntary cooperation between business sectors and farming interests—and a heavy dose of patience—as the best formula to address the crisis, assuring citizens that “any lack of confidence in the economic future...is foolish.” Clearly, the Hoover administration’s “business as usual” approach vastly underestimated the magnitude of the situation.

In his acceptance speech at the 1932 Democratic National Convention, Franklin Delano Roosevelt boldly declared, “I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American public.” Americans’ steadily increasing dissatisfaction with Hoover was evident. John Garner, Roosevelt’s running mate, remarked to FDR during the campaign that to win “all you have to do is stay alive until election day.” True enough, for Roosevelt scored a solid November victory.

When the new President took office in 1933, the devastating effects of the Great Depression had already come to weigh heavily on the nation. Banking operations had been suspended in four-fifths of the states and the national unemployment rate had reached an astounding 25%—some 14 million Americans were jobless—with no end in sight. Public panic and government confusion were rampant. There were no precedents for this level of economic calamity. The task ahead for FDR was daunting.



[SOURCE: Portland (OR) *Journal*]



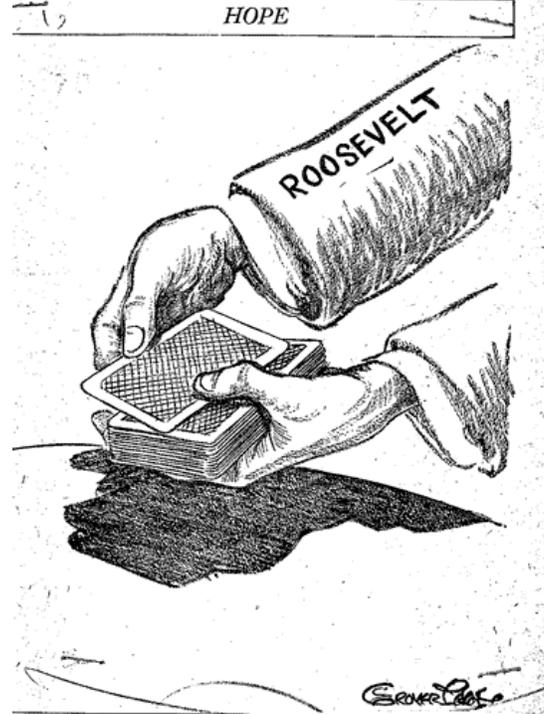
[SOURCE: Hutton in Marshall (TX) *Messenger*]

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Hear Ye!



[SOURCE: Unknown]

HOPE



[SOURCE: Unknown]

QUALIFYING TEST FOR SUPREME COURT JOBS



[SOURCE: New York Tribune]



[SOURCE: Casey Orr]

- In what various ways do the cartoonists portray some of the stiff challenges facing President Roosevelt in his effort to repair the ailing economy?
- What are some of the forms by which the cartoons depict FDR's strengths?
- Identify some opposing forces, as illustrated, standing in the way of FDR's policies.
- For each component of the New Deal—relief, recovery, reform—identify a cartoon which you believe applies (positively or negatively).
- How do some of the cartoonists show the New Deal unfavorably?
- What other animal could have logically been used to block the railroad track in "The First Job" cartoon?
- What is the purpose of using former President Theodore Roosevelt in the Richmond *Times-Dispatch* cartoon?
- "The Way to Prosperity" and "Hope" both have encouraging captions. Do the illustrations deliver a message of optimism or pessimism about the economy's future under FDR?
- The subject of two cartoons is President Roosevelt and his relationship with the Supreme Court. Do the drawings present like-minded or conflicting messages?
- Based on your present base of knowledge, which drawing do you think would serve best as a history mini-lesson about the Great Depression and FDR's New Deal?