

## 24 Candidate Roosevelt



Hunger marchers in Washington, D.C. In 1932, the year FDR was elected president, one out of four Americans belonged to a family in which no one had full-time work.

The little plane tossed about in the heavy wind. The pilot, looking down, followed the path of the old Erie Canal; he was flying from Albany to Chicago. Twice he landed for more fuel. In the backseat, the plane's violent swaying was too much for young John Roosevelt. He threw up.

But John didn't even tell his parents. They were busy. His father was polishing a speech he was soon to deliver. FDR was on his way to the Democratic National

Convention to personally accept that party's nomination for president of the United States. No candidate had done that before.

In the old horse-and-buggy days, before telephones, it sometimes took a week or more for a messenger to tell a candidate he had been chosen by his party to run for president. Only then was the candidate expected to make an acceptance

### A New Deal—Deal Us In!

**W**hen Roosevelt accepted the Democratic Party's nomination for president, he pledged a "new deal for the American people." A cartoonist picked up the phrase, and *New Deal* was the name soon given to President Roosevelt's domestic (home) policies. The ideas of the New Deal were firmly in the American tradition. They were based on Progressive ideas: on opposition to mo-

nopoly; on a belief that government should help regulate the economy; and on the conviction that no one wants to be poor and that most poverty is the result of social problems. The New Deal's methods were experimental; some worked, some didn't. The Progressive Party was important at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Theodore Roosevelt was a Progressive.



speech. That time gap had been continued for tradition's sake. Roosevelt saw no reason to stick with the old ways.

Besides, Roosevelt wanted people to know he would be an active candidate and president. If anyone was worried that his weak legs would slow him down, he would show them: they would not. So he flew to Chicago, locked the braces on his legs, and stood before the delegates.

"I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people," said FDR in his captivating, mellifluous voice. To a nation that had suffered three years of devastating depression, the words *new deal* sounded very good. The Republican candidate, Herbert Hoover, didn't have a chance.

Whether he deserved it or not, Hoover was blamed for the Depression. Roosevelt campaigned hard, but he didn't have to. People wanted a change. The election was a landslide. Forty-two of forty-eight states went Democratic.

Today, because of the 20th Amendment (adopted in 1933), a candidate elected in November becomes president in January.

In 1932, the delay was longer. Roosevelt did not take office until March. Between Election Day in November 1932 and Inauguration Day in March 1933, the economic situation got worse and worse.

By March, the U.S. economy seemed close to collapse. Every day more and more banks closed. Those who had gold were hoarding it. There was even a question as to whether the government had enough money to meet its payroll. A newspaper reporter described the mood of the people in Washington, D.C., as like "a beleaguered capital in wartime." General Douglas MacArthur prepared his troops for a possible riot. Capitalism, said many experts, was too sick to recover.



Hyde Park's front porch on election night: left to right, daughter Anna, son John, mother Sara, FDR, son Franklin Jr., and Eleanor.

**Mellifluous** (muh-LIFF-floous) means "flowing and sweet as honey." It is from the same roots as *mellow* and *fluid*.



It wasn't only speculators who lost money in the Great Crash. A lot of banks failed, and many people lost all their savings; there was no banking insurance then.



As the black crows of hard times come flying over the horizon, this cartoon mocks Hoover's attempts to scare them off with a straw man.

**Beleaguered** means "under siege."



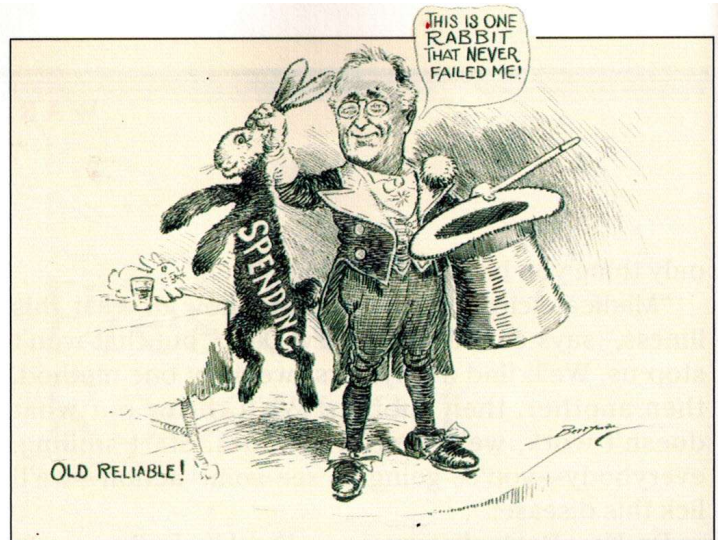


This seems to be a photograph, but look closely: it's really a collage (a paste-up) put together from several photos by an anonymous artist to honor FDR.

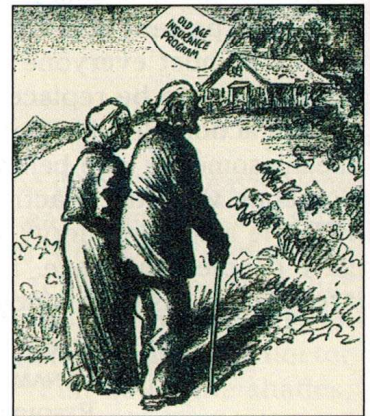
### A Woman in the Cabinet



In 1933 President Roosevelt appoints Frances Perkins as his secretary of labor. She serves for 12 years, in all his administrations, and is the first woman cabinet member.



One senator said, "The admirable trait about Roosevelt is that he has the guts to try." His opponents said programs such as Social Security (right) could be paid for only by raising taxes and spending too much money.



Hoover packed his bags and left the White House.

The next day, March 4, 1933, Franklin Roosevelt stood, bareheaded, in front of the Capitol, holding tightly to a lectern. It was his inauguration day. Some small boys perched in nearby tree limbs; dignitaries sat in special seats; but most of the crowd stood and shivered in the cold wind. When the new president spoke, his strong voice cut through the gloom. All across the land, people clustered around radios to hear what he had to say.

"This nation asks for action, and action now," said President Roosevelt. "We must act quickly."

And that was exactly what he did: act quickly. The first 100 days of his presidency are famous for all the things that got done. Congress was on vacation when Roosevelt took office. He called Congress back into session. He began to act. Soon new programs and laws were pouring out of Washington. "It is common sense to take a method and try it," said Roosevelt. "If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something."

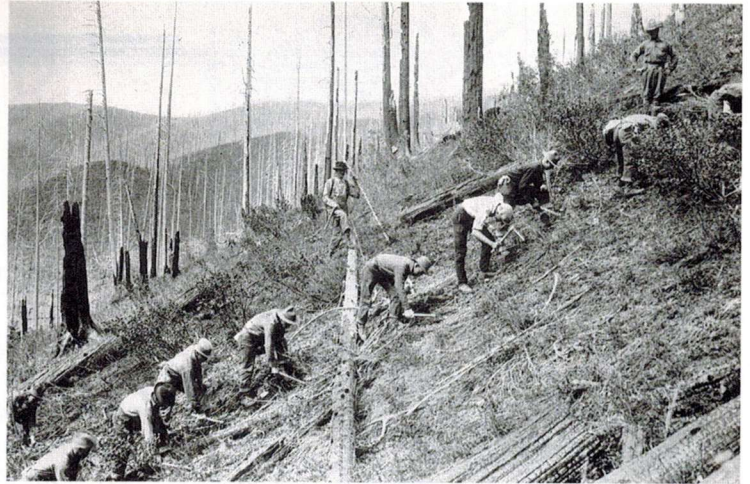
And he also said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

FDR put together a group of advisers. Newspaper reporters called them "the brain trust." Many were college professors. They were new to government, but they had ideas, intelligence, and a desire to help their country. They worked hard. Washington became an exciting place for idealistic, energetic citizen workers.



Roosevelt's ideas really were a "New Deal." He changed America profoundly. He probably saved American capitalism, but he changed some of its habits. The New Deal did away with most child labor, regulated the stock market, made bank deposits safe, helped make employers pay fair wages to employees, encouraged workers' unions, limited hours of work, helped farmers, brought electricity into rural areas, and gave Americans an old-age pension policy called "Social Security." The New Deal made the government an active participant in citizens' lives. Yet most of the ideas of the New Deal were not really new. They were the old Progressive ideas in a new package. They had already been tried in Europe. America was behind the times when it came to social welfare.

In order to put people to work, the New Deal sent young people out of doors and paid them to plant trees, build parks, and fight fires. It paid painters to paint murals, writers to write books, and musicians to play and create music. Needy people were given money for food and shelter.



**Civilian Conservation Corps members planting seedlings in Oregon. Young men between ages 18 and 25 whose families were on relief got room and board for a year and were paid \$30 a month, \$25 of which went straight to their families.**

## **New Ideas for a New Deal**

*Here are some of the best-known New Deal programs (a star means the program still exists today):*

- \* The SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION (SEC) was formed to regulate the stock market.
- \* The FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION (FDIC) insured bank deposits. We no longer had to fear bank failures.
- The CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS (CCC) gave jobs to more than 2 million out-of-work young men in the nation's parklands: building roads, trails, cabins, and campgrounds: Many are still in use today.
- The PUBLIC WORKS ADMINISTRATION (PWA) built New York's Triborough Bridge and Lincoln Tunnel; Oregon's Coastal Highway; Texas's port of Brownsville; the road between Key West and mainland Florida; and the University of New Mexico's library.
- The CIVILIAN WORKS ADMINISTRATION (CWA) lasted less than a year, but employed more than 4 million men and women. Opera singers were sent to the Ozark mountains (where none had ever sung before); teachers kept rural schools open; Native Americans restocked the Kodiak Islands with snowshoe rabbits.
- \* The TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY (TVA) began as a federally directed experiment in regional planning. The TVA built five dams along the Tennessee River and provided cheap electric power, flood control, and irrigation water to seven states.
- \* The SOCIAL SECURITY ACT established old-age pensions, unemployment benefits, and welfare benefits for the elderly, children, and the handicapped.
- The WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION (WPA) provided useful jobs. WPA workers built highways, cleared slums, and labored in rural areas. Writers were paid to write regional guidebooks and compile oral histories. Painters painted murals in public buildings; musicians organized orchestras; actors brought plays to communities that had never experienced live theater. Between 1935 and 1939, the WPA gave work to 8.5 million people.





This cartoon caption says, "Come along. We're going to the Trans-Lux to hiss Roosevelt." The Trans-Lux was a newsreel theater (this was before TV). Who are those people, and why are they going to hiss Roosevelt?

Critics of the New Deal saw the government diving gaily into an ocean of spending and debt and taking the drowning taxpayer with it.



Roosevelt did something else. Something that was really new and innovative. Something that people in power almost never do without a battle. He shared power with those who had never held it before.

From the country's earliest days, the leaders of the United States had mostly been drawn from one group: white Protestant men of northern European descent.

Franklin Roosevelt was part of that white-Protestant-male traditional aristocracy of privilege. But he opened its doors. He included in positions of government power those who had been excluded: women, blacks, eastern Europeans, southern Europeans, American Indians, Catholics, and Jews. He began a process that soon added Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and all who are citizens. He rejected the idea of an aristocracy of birth and replaced it with the goal of an aristocracy of talent.

There were those who hated him for doing it. It is hard for us today to imagine how much some people hated him. He was called "a traitor to his class." Some who had gone to school with him refused to speak his name.

Some, in the business world, hated him, too. Business leaders had been the heroes of the Roaring Twenties. Calvin Coolidge had said, "The business of America is business." The Depression changed all that. Now Roosevelt was the popular hero, and the American people were demanding that business be regulated for the public good.

But the Supreme Court began vetoing New Deal legislation. FDR, fighting back, tried to add extra justices to the bench (justices friendly to him). That court-packing plan was a poor idea that cost the New Deal support and slowed its momentum.

Before the New Deal, government had been expected to provide conditions that would help business. But government was expected to do nothing for the workers who made business profits possible. With Roosevelt, many laws were passed to help workers, farmers and ordinary citizens. Government money was spent on the poor. Some people didn't like that idea. But others understood that, if it was done wisely, the nation would be stronger and better for it.