

Reflections on the Great Depression and the New Deal

READING 1

I want to tell you about an experience we had in Philadelphia when our private funds were exhausted and before public funds become available. . . .

One woman said she borrowed 50 cents from a friend and bought stale bread for 3 and a half cents per loaf, and that is all they had for eleven days except for one or two meals. . . . One woman went along the docks and picked up vegetables that fell from the wagons. Sometimes the fish vendors gave her fish at the end of the day. On two different occasions this family was without food for a day and a half. . . . Another family did not have food for two days. Then the husband went out and gathered dandelions and the family lived on them.

Senate Committee on Manufactures, 1932

READING 2

	25 Year Old Waitress	43 Year Old Housewife	54 Year Old Molder
Chief Need	Money	Money	Money
Meaning of Money	Joys the rich have	Chance to educate children	No more relief orders
Chief Fear	Loss of job	Poverty	Things will never get better
Does the government owe you a living?	No	No	Thinks U.S. owes all a job
Who is responsible for depression?	The bankers and building an loan men	Drift away from church	Capitalism's greed
Would you farm if you had land?	Yes, if I knew how	No	No
Has religion helped you?	When things were worse	Almost by itself	No
Do you want government to plan the future?	Thinks the government can plan without restricting	Will abide by the plan that offers a better day	Wants help not advice

(Columbus, Ohio) Citizen, 1934

READING 3

The proposals of our opponents will endanger or destroy our system. . . . I especially emphasize that promise to promote "employment for all surplus labor at all times." At first I could not believe that anyone would be so cruel as to hold out a hope so absolutely impossible of realization to these 10,000,000 who are unemployed. . . . If it were possible to give this employment to 10,000,000 people by the government, it would cost upwards of \$9,000,000,000 a year. . . . It would pull down the employment of those who are still at work by the high taxes and the demoralization of credit upon which their employment is dependent. . . . It would mean the growth of a fearful bureaucracy which, once established, could never be dislodged.

Herbert Hoover, 1932

READING 4

We have two problems: first, to meet the immediate distress; second, to build up on a basis of permanent employment. As to "immediate relief," the first principle is that this nation . . . owes a positive duty that no citizen shall be permitted to starve. . . . In addition to providing emergency relief, the Federal Government should and must provide temporary work wherever that is possible. You and I know that in the national forests, on flood prevention, and on the development of waterway projects. . . . tens of thousands, and even hundreds of thousands of our unemployed citizens can be given at least temporary employment. . . . Finally . . . we call for a coordinated system of employment exchanges, the advance planning of public works, and unemployment reserves.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1932

READING 5

It is impossible for the United States to preserve itself as a republic or as a democracy when 600 families own more of this nation's wealth—in fact, twice as much—as all the balance of the people put together. . . . Here is the whole sum and substance of the share-our-wealth movement:

1. Every family to be furnished by the government a homestead allowance, free of debt, of not less than one-third the average family wealth of the country. . . . No person to have a fortune of more than 100 to 300 times the average family fortune. . . .
2. The yearly income of every family shall be not less than one-third of the average family income. . . . No yearly income shall be allowed to any person larger than from 100 to 300 times the size of the average family income. . . .
3. To limit or regulate the hours of work to such an extent as to prevent overproduction. . . .
4. An old-age pension to the persons of 60. . . .
7. Education and training for all children to be equal in opportunity in all schools, colleges, universities, and other institutions for training in the professions and vocations of life; to be regulated on the capacity of children to learn, and not on the ability of parents to pay the costs.

Huey Long

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What caused the Great Depression? Was it an historical aberration or was it a predictable outcome of the economic system that existed in the United States until the 1930s?
2. Describe the human toll of the Great Depression.
3. What did people believe caused the depression?
4. Why did President Hoover resist taking radical steps to solve the depression?
5. What solutions did Franklin Roosevelt and Huey Long offer?
6. How effective were New Deal economic policies in solving the problems of the depression?