

FDR on the Great Depression

As Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, he declared again his plan to give the federal government a large and central role in attacking the Great Depression. These are condensed excerpts from two of his most famous speeches as president.

First Inaugural Address – 1933



This is the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great nation will endure as it has endured, will

revive and will prosper.

So first of all let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

In every dark hour of our national life a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that support of the people themselves which is essential to victory.

In such a spirit on my part and on yours we face our common difficulties. The withered leaves of industrial enterprise lie on every side; farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of many years in thousands of families are gone.

More important, a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return [work for low wages].

This nation asks for action, and action now. Our greatest primary task is to put people to work. It can be accomplished in part by direct recruiting by the government itself, treating the task as we would treat the

emergency of war, but at the same time, through this employment, accomplishing greatly needed projects.

This task can be helped by definite efforts to raise the values of agricultural products, and with this, the power to purchase the output of our cities.

It can be helped by preventing the tragedy of the growing loss, through foreclosure, of our small homes and our farms.

It can be helped by unifying relief [welfare] activities which are often scattered, uneconomical, and unequal.

Finally, we require two safeguards against a return of the evils of the old order. There must be a strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments.

We do not distrust the future of essential democracy. The people of the United States have not failed. In their need they have registered a mandate that they want direct, vigorous action.

They have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift, I take it.

The New Deal programs developed by FDR and Congress created jobs for a great many unemployed people. Other measures were also adopted to improve the economy.

As he began his second term in 1937, FDR outlined an even more ambitious goal for the federal government.

Second Inaugural Address – 1937

Nearly all of us recognize that as the intricacies of human relationships increase, so power to govern them must also increase – power to stop evil; power to do good.

True, we have come far from the days of stagnation and despair. Vitality has been

preserved. Courage and confidence have been restored. Mental and moral horizons have been extended.

I see a great nation, upon a great continent, blessed with a great wealth of natural resources. Its 130 million people are at peace among themselves; they are making their country a good neighbor among the nations.

But here is the challenge to our democracy: In this nation I see tens of millions of its citizens – a substantial part of its whole population – who at this very moment are denied the greater part of what the very lowest standards of living of today call the necessities of life.

I see millions of families trying to live on incomes so meager that the pall [threat] of family disaster hangs over them day by day.

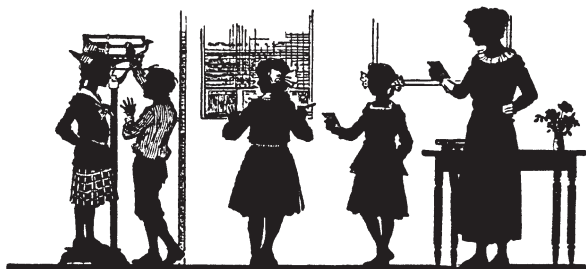
I see millions whose daily lives in city and on farm continue under conditions labeled indecent by a so-called polite society a century ago.

I see millions denied education, recreation, and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children.

I see one third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished.

It is not in despair that I paint you that picture. I paint it for you in hope – because the nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it, proposes to paint it out.

We are determined to make every American citizen the subject of his country's



interest and concern; and we will never regard any faithful, law-abiding group within our borders as superfluous [unwanted].

The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have too much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.



Today we reconsecrate our country to long-cherished ideals in a suddenly changed civilization. In every land there are always at work forces that drive men apart and forces that draw men together. In our personal ambitions we are individualists. But in our seeking for economic and political progress as a nation, we all go up, or else we all go down, as one people.

In taking again the oath of office as President of the United States, I assume the solemn obligation of leading the American people forward along the road over which they have chosen to advance.

Questions:

1. In the first speech, what does FDR say is the primary task the federal government must do as the first step in fighting the depression? What other measures does he say are also needed to boost the economy?

2. In the second speech, what goals does FDR set for the American government? How does he explain or justify the need for expanding the role of government in American life?

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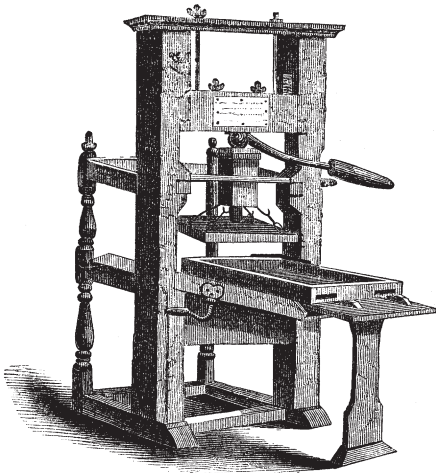
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