

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

On Ending the Depression

The presidential campaign of 1932 was a contest not only between two men, but also between two contrasting views of government.

As you read the passages below, try to identify the arguments for and against a “new deal” for Americans.

ROOSEVELT’S VIEW OF GOVERNMENT

In a campaign address on October 13, 1932, Franklin Roosevelt explained how he viewed the duties and responsibilities of the federal government. Below is an excerpt from the speech.

The first principle I would lay down is that the primary duty rests on the community, through local government and private agencies, to take care of the relief of unemployment. But we then come to a situation where there are so many people out of work that local funds are insufficient.

It seems clear to me that the organized society known as the State comes into the picture at this point. In other words, the obligation of government is extended to the next higher unit. . . .

It took the present Republican administration in Washington almost three years to recognize this principle. I have recounted to you in other speeches, and it is a matter of general information, that for at least two years after the crash, the only efforts made by the national administration to cope with the distress of unemployment were to deny its existence. . . .

I have constantly reiterated my conviction that the expenditures of cities, states, and the federal government must be reduced in the interest of the nation as a whole. I believe that there are many ways in which such reduction of expenditures can take place, but I am utterly unwilling that economy should be practised at the expense of starving people.

We must economize in other ways, but it shall never be said that the American people have refused to provide the necessities of life for those who, through no fault of their own, are unable to feed, clothe, and house themselves. The first obligation of government is the protection of the welfare and well-being, indeed the very existence, of its citizens. . . .

HOOVER’S VIEW OF GOVERNMENT

In a campaign speech delivered at Madison Square Garden in New York City on October 31, 1932, President Hoover set forth his view on the causes of and cures for the Depression.

We are told by the opposition that we must have a change, that we must have a new deal. It is not the change that comes from normal development of national life to which I object but the proposal to alter the whole foundation of our national life which [has] been [built] through generations of testing and struggle, and of the principles upon which we have [built] the nation. . . .

Our economic system has received abnormal shocks during the past three years, which temporarily dislocated its normal functioning. These shocks have in a large sense come from without our borders, but I say to you that our system of government has enabled us to take such strong action as to prevent the disaster which would otherwise have come to our nation. It has enabled us further to develop measures and programs which are now demonstrating their ability to bring about restoration and progress. . . .

Our system is . . . founded on the conception that only through ordered liberty, through freedom to the individual, and equal opportunity to the individual will his initiative and enterprise be summoned to spur the march of progress. . . .

It is in the further development of this cooperation and a sense of its responsibility that we should find solution for many of our complex problems, and not by the extension of government into our economic and social life. The greatest function of government is to build up that cooperation, and its most resolute action should be to deny the extension of bureaucracy.