

# Great Depression: The New Deal

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TOP: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signs the National Labor Relations Act. Courtesy of Getty Images. BOTTOM: Men from the Reforestation Army, part of the Civilian Conservation Corps created by President Roosevelt's New Deal programs, clear brush from a hillside in the St. Joe National Forest and plant seedlings, Idaho, 1930s. Courtesy of Getty Images

Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the only president in U.S. history who served three terms. He was in office from 1933 to 1945. Many people have very different opinions about Roosevelt. For some, he was a brilliant leader who helped save the country in a time of terrible conditions. Others view him as a president who gave the government too much power over American citizens and their businesses.

Franklin Roosevelt (1882–1945) was the only son of a rich upstate New York family. He was a distant relative of President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1905, Franklin married the president's niece, Eleanor Roosevelt, who later became a much-loved first lady.

Roosevelt first trained as a lawyer but became more interested in government. In 1910 he was elected to New York's state Senate.

## Governor of New York

In 1928, Roosevelt became governor of New York. Soon after he took office, the Great Depression hit the country. Businesses failed and millions of people lost their jobs. In New York, Roosevelt introduced new laws and programs to help those who were out of work. His efforts soon made him very popular.

In 1932, Roosevelt ran for president of the United States. By then, the Depression was worse than ever. Roosevelt promised a "new deal" to help those in need. He easily defeated President Herbert Hoover, who was seeking a second term. In 1933, Roosevelt became the 32nd president of the United States.

Once in office, Roosevelt quickly took a series of bold steps. He introduced many new programs that provided help both to those who had lost their jobs and to the poor and elderly. Together, these programs are known as the New Deal.

The New Deal also created jobs by putting people to work building all sort of things. Many new schools, post offices, airports, houses and dams were built.

Some of these projects were very large. One example was the Tennessee Valley Authority, which spread over seven states. Its goal was to make the region more modern. The Authority built dams to protect lowlands against floods. It brought electricity and running water to thousands of homes for the first time.



### **New Deal less than perfect**

There were ways in which Roosevelt and his New Deal were less than perfect, however. For example, the New Deal did little to stop widespread discrimination against black Americans. Many of the New Deal programs allowed the kind of discrimination that kept blacks from getting good jobs. As a result, the Depression was even worse for blacks than it was for whites.

Roosevelt's first two terms were taken up with trying to lift Americans out of the Great Depression. His third term was more concerned with World War II, which broke out in Europe in 1939.

When Roosevelt ran for his third term in 1940 he promised to keep the United States out of the war. Soon, the country no longer had that choice. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked U.S. ships in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States.

### **Great war president**

Roosevelt was a great war president. Without him, Germany and the Nazis might have won the war.

What Roosevelt could not do was end the Depression. Only World War II could do that because it put many people to work in support of the war effort.

What the New Deal did was provide many new protections we now take for granted. It gave us welfare for the poor and unemployment pay for those who lose their jobs. It gave us pensions for

the elderly who can no longer work. Together these things form what is called a social safety net.

There are those who say the New Deal went too far. They believe it gave the government too much control over Americans' lives. They say the government should not be in the business of taking care of people.

Either way, Roosevelt and his New Deal left a lasting mark on our society.

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