**“Herbert Hoover on the Great Depression and New Deal, 1931–1933”**

The stock market crashed on Thursday, October 24, 1929, less than eight months into Herbert Hoover’s presidency. Most experts, including Hoover, thought the crash was part of a passing recession. By July 1931, when the President wrote this letter to a friend, Governor Louis Emmerson of Illinois, it had become clear that excessive speculation and a worldwide economic slowdown had plunged America into the midst of a Great Depression. While Hoover wrote to Emmerson that “considerable continuance of destitution over the winter” and perhaps longer was unavoidable, he was trying to “get machinery of the country into . . . action.” Since the crash, Hoover had worked ceaselessly trying to fix the economy. He founded government agencies, encouraged labor harmony, supported local aid for public works, fostered cooperation between government and business in order to stabilize prices, and struggled to balance the budget. His work focused on indirect relief from individual states and the private sector, as reflected in this letter’s emphasis on “supporting each state committee more effectively” and volunteerism—“appealing for funds” from outside the government.

As the Depression became worse, however, calls grew for increased federal intervention and spending. But Hoover refused to involve the federal government in forcing fixed prices, controlling businesses, or manipulating the value of the currency, all of which he felt were steps towards socialism. He was inclined to give indirect aid to banks or local public works projects, but he refused to use federal money for direct aid to citizens, believing the dole would weaken public morale. Instead, he focused on volunteerism to raise money. Hoover’s opponents painted him as uncaring toward the common citizen, even though he was in fact a philanthropist and a progressive before becoming president. During his reelection campaign, Hoover tried to convince Americans that the measures they were calling for might seem to help in the short term, but would be ruinous in the long run. He asserted that he cared for common Americans too much to destroy the country’s foundations with deficits and socialist institutions. He was soundly defeated by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932.

Roosevelt promised Americans a “New Deal” when he took office, and during his first “Hundred Days” as president, he signed a number of groundbreaking new laws. Roosevelt’s aides later admitted that most New Deal agencies were closely modeled on those that Hoover had attempted, but Roosevelt’s plans differed in financing and scope. New Deal bills supported direct federal aid, tightened government control over many industries, and eschewed volunteerism in favor of deficit spending, all in the hopes of jump starting both consumer confidence and the economy.

In a letter to a friend written seven months after he left office, Hoover expressed his fears about the flurry of New Deal legislation. Hoover saw the country already “going sour on the New Deal.” He believed revolution inevitable “unless there is a halt” to the fundamental changes in government and the deficit spending. Roosevelt’s reforms had led Americans to “cast off all moorings,” and Hoover predicted that the United States would veer dangerously “to the ‘left,’” followed by a reaction leading to “some American interpretation of Hitler or Mussolini.” In 1934, after two years out of the public eye, Hoover made these same thoughts public in an article titled “The Challenge to Liberty.” Hoover was correct when he predicted that the role of American government would fundamentally change because of the New Deal. (See attached Documents A and B)

**“FDR’s First Inaugural Address”**

Several years ago when I was researching a very different subject at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park, New York, I happened across several archival documents related to FDR’s first inaugural address. As a very famous presidential oration—arguably the most famous inaugural address ever delivered—FDR’s speech and the related documents were intriguing. How many drafts of the address survive? What do those drafts tell us about the strategy and tactics behind the speech? And how did the very perilous times affect the drafting of it?

An archivist was very pleased to bring me a copy of the famous address from the Master Speech File. Here is a copy of the first page of that document:



I immediately took note of the distinctive handwriting, which the archivist informed me was in fact FDR’s. It was clearly a draft since it contained deletions and insertions. As I marveled at this historically important document, nagging questions surfaced. Where was that most felicitous phrase, perhaps the most famous ever delivered by an American president—“the only thing we have to fear is fear itself”? Why not show me the speech as FDR delivered it on March 4, 1933? Why not show me, in other words, the typewritten reading copy that FDR used that momentous afternoon? After all, this is not the easiest document to read and it’s clearly not the finished version. Such questions, as it turns out, completely miss the point—a point it took me several more years of archival work to answer.

As I eventually discovered, the person who drafted the first complete version of FDR’s inaugural address was a Columbia University political science professor by the name of Raymond Moley. An Ohio native, Moley had come to the attention of Roosevelt when he’d become governor of New York in 1929. Not long after the two men reconnected in 1932, Moley was essentially running Roosevelt’s presidential campaign—including the very important task of drafting major policy speeches. The political science professor could hardly believe the transformation: from lecturing undergraduates to advising and speaking for the man who would likely become America’s next president!

By September of 1932, and after months of campaigning, it had become clear to Roosevelt that he would be the nation’s thirty-second president. And, because of the country’s dire economic situation, he would need to move quickly to catalyze the momentum of a newly elected Congress and a new administration. On the evening of September 22, at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, California, Roosevelt asked Moley to draft the inaugural address, to which the professor replied that he would be honored.

But more than four months later, and after Roosevelt’s crushing defeat of the Republican incumbent, Herbert Hoover, Moley’s important task had gone unfulfilled. We know this today because Moley kept careful notes and a detailed diary of his activities. He also kept drafts of his attempts at a compelling speech. And by even the most charitable estimates, his initial efforts to compose the inaugural address were awful. His first draft, after several initial outlines, started thus: “America is a sick nation in the midst of a sick world. We are sick because of our failure to recognize economic changes in time, and to make provision against their consequences.” The same February 13 draft only got worse as the professor continued: “He [the good neighbor] is not moved or deceived by the unsubstantial and sometimes trivial results of broad pretensions of interrelationships.” These were the vague sentiments of an uninspired and vastly overworked man. Was he drafting an economic textbook or attempting to craft a vitally important speech?

Everything seemed to change for Raymond Moley as a result of two events on February 15 and February 17. On the 15th, Moley was in Florida to consult with the vacationing President-elect when his boat docked in Miami. That evening, before a large gathering at Bayfront Park, Roosevelt delivered some brief and impromptu remarks from the back of an open-canopied car. As Roosevelt concluded, gunfire rang out. Because of a wobbly park bench and the quick thinking of one spectator, the shots, fired by a 33-year-old unemployed Italian bricklayer, Giuseppe Zangara, and clearly meant for the soon-to-be president, missed their target. Moley witnessed the entire event. Later that evening, expecting to find a very frightened Roosevelt, Moley instead noted how relaxed, calm, and perhaps even placid Roosevelt was in the face of mortal danger. Two days later, while flying to Cincinnati from Florida in a two-seated Army airplane, Moley’s pilot lost his way and ran out of gas; they crash-landed in a farmer’s field near Maynardville, Tennessee. Remarkably, both the pilot and Moley were unharmed.

Just days after these two harrowing encounters with death, Raymond Moley completed a draft—finally—of what would become FDR’s first inaugural address. That draft was far different from his earlier efforts; it was eloquent, specific, memorable, and yes, moving. Moley knew he was lucky to even be alive, let alone writing a presidential inaugural address.

On the evening of February 27 in Hyde Park, New York, Moley showed Roosevelt the draft he had carefully composed. The President-elect read through it and was very pleased; Moley had gotten the message and the tone just right. The two men stayed up late editing the draft—and putting it in Roosevelt’s own handwriting. Moley had understood all along that his role in the speech would have to be minimized—or removed altogether. Thanks to the diary he dictated to his secretary Celeste Jedell, and later amended, we know what transpired in the early hours of February 28th.



After Roosevelt finished writing, Moley gathered up the scattered pages of his typed draft, walked to the fireplace and threw them into the embers. He said to Roosevelt, “This is your speech.”[7] Moley’s role in the drafting of FDR’s First Inaugural Address would remain a well-kept secret for nearly four decades. Perhaps more importantly, even today guardians of the Roosevelt legacy are eager to showcase the handwritten draft of one of the most important state papers in our nation’s history. Raymond Moley would hardly be surprised.

But what of that draft and its rhetorical contents? Beyond authorship, what does the Moley/Roosevelt draft tell us about how they perceived the demands of the moment? While space doesn’t permit extensive rhetorical criticism, the first paragraph of the draft is illustrative. The final draft of the speech reads:

“I am certain that on this day my fellow Americans expect that upon my induction into the presidency I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impels. This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly.”

Let’s note several important things about this most consequential opening: first, the nation was starved for rhetorical leadership that was “certain.” We should remember that Roosevelt had been very silent for the better part of four months. Moreover, the Congress displayed almost no leadership from December 1932 to March 1933 when the country’s economic system was imploding. Unemployment neared 25%, the nation’s banks were closing minute by minute, and nobody in a position of authority seemed to have any idea how to stem the tide. The nation yearned for a leadership that expressed itself with “I am certain.”

Second, note that Roosevelt and Moley open the address with expectations about what to say; in other words, the speech opens with a comment about presidential speech—and its expectations. That “candor” and “decision” was a rather direct critique of Herbert Hoover’s rhetorical leadership. Perhaps the most important context in making sense of this speech is the Hoover presidency—and its almost daily insistence that the economic crisis was caused and then exacerbated by a lack of collective confidence. If only the nation would believe that things were improving, that confidence would engender money staying in banks and people taking out loans, which in turn would begin to stoke the nation’s economic engines. Since Black Monday, October 29, 1929, Hoover had relied almost exclusively on this rhetorical appeal of collective confidence. Notice that the Roosevelt/Moley draft begins with a rather heavy-handed pronouncement that the Roosevelt administration would not be making daily appeals to confidence; the nation needed “candor” and “truth,” not false promises.

Third, the discerning reader will see that Roosevelt’s candor is punctuated with a familiar oath: “This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly.” Just after the new president had taken a solemn oath administered by the chief justice of the Supreme Court to uphold the nation’s Constitution, Roosevelt made another oath often heard in a court of law: “to speak the truth, the whole truth, so help you God.” Unlike Hoover, Roosevelt pledged to tell the nation the truth, even if it was unpleasant or disagreeable. Their witness to that oath secured an important new bond between leader and led.

From the very first ten-point outline of the speech, Roosevelt and Moley agreed that action must be stressed; the nation would be starved for some sort of collective attempts to deal with the collapsing economy. In the middle of the address, note the important repetition:

“Yes, the task [of economic improvement] can be helped by definite efforts to raise the values of agricultural products . . . 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 insistence that the Federal, the State, and the local governments act forthwith on the demand that their cost be drastically reduced. It can be helped by the unifying of relief activities . . . It can be helped by national planning for and supervision of all forms of transportation and communication . . . There are many ways in which it can be helped but it can never be helped by merely talking about it. We must act, we must act quickly.”

The repetition of such actions were unmistakably not Hoover’s talking cure; even as these actions were delivered in a speech, the new president promised far more than mere words. The famous “First 100 Days” of the Roosevelt administration would bear strong testimony to this promise.

President Roosevelt’s wife, Eleanor, confessed to being frightened at only one point during the twenty-minute address. Near the close of the inaugural, Roosevelt stated:

“But in the event that the Congress fails to take one of these two courses, in the event that the national emergency is still critical, I shall not evade the clear course of duty that will then confront me. I shall ask the Congress for the one remaining instrument to meet the crisis: broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power would be if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.”

This statement was punctuated by a huge swelling of applause by the estimated 100,000 gathered listeners. It frightened the First Lady. Such ringing and massive applause suggested that the fragile bonds of law and order could be torn asunder at any moment.

As the nation’s new president closed his address just minutes after 1:30 (EST), thousands of Americans grabbed stationery and pen, eager to register their new-found confidence in a man they barely knew. Scores wrote that this remarkable speech, reminiscent of Lincoln, Jefferson, and Washington, marked Roosevelt as the nation’s heaven-sent savior. Many others urged Roosevelt to assume dictatorial powers since Congress wasn’t willing to act—and he clearly was. Hunger trumped constitutional duty. Still others wrote to their new president and declared that the all-important entity called confidence had in fact returned—all in less than 2,000 words and twenty minutes.

As he left the inaugural viewing area for the parade, Raymond Moley turned to a colleague and declared, “Well, he’s taken the ship of state and turned it right around.” We can certainly forgive Moley for just a bit of hyperbole; after all, the nation’s new direction was one that he’d helped chart.

**Honors U.S. History**

**“Essay outline Assignment”**

**Mr. Fernandez**

Step One:

1. Review the following statement and complete the following tasks with it in mind:

“President F.D.R.’s response to the Great Depression was more effective than that of President Hoover.”

1. Take time in class to silently read this entire packet concerning President Hoover and President Roosevelt’s reactions to the Great Depression. Review the primary documents to glean details.

 Step Two:

1. Take class time to silently study your textbook for more contextual information concerning the two administrations and their reactions to the Great Depression.

Step Three:

Answer the following questions:

1. Create a chart citing specific evidence from your textbook which supports the ideas presented in this reading… Hoover on left side and Roosevelt on the right.
2. Considering the stereotypes of the two parties in the 20th and 21st centuries, are you surprised at the Republican and/ or Democratic Party’s responses to the Great Depression? Explain your answer either direction.

Step Four:

Upon completing the reading, reviewing your textbook, and researching other sources, take a stand, or choose a position, concerning the following statement – affirming or opposing:

**“President F.D.R.’s response to the Great Depression was more effective than that of President Hoover.”**

1. Justify your chosen position by creating an outline of information that you would cite in an essay on this topic.
2. Be sure to include mitigating factors related to your chosen position… include them in your outline… “mitigating” means information that you discover in opposition to your argument that you recognize, but does not change your decision.
3. Bring your outlines to class Monday for discussion and analysis amongst your peers.