

Mr. Roosevelt Comes to Champaign County: An Examination of the New Deal

Fellowship Lesson 2009
Marshall Schacht (St. Joseph-Ogden High School)
Champaign County Historical Archives

Lesson 1: Election of 1932

After learning about the causes of the stock market crash and life during the early depression, students will consider the political choice before them. We will review Herbert Hoover's reaction to the depression and the subsequent backlash by the public (Hoovervilles, The Bonus Army). Students will have read a brief biographical sketch of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Herbert Hoover to prepare for the simulation.

Students will be given a brief description of three party choices:

Party 1: In power since the end of WWI pledging to begin a new era of prosperity, democracy, freedom and peace. "Return to Normalcy". Several years of depression and joblessness have hurt the party's popularity and legitimacy.

Party 2: Pledges to return the power to the common working man by overthrowing the current system and establishing a communist government. "Capitalism is the true enemy of man"—Karl Marx

Party 3: Many new ideas for getting the country moving toward greatness again. Progress through order. Supported by youth and frustrated public. "Extreme situations demand extreme measures."

Students will be given the opportunity to lobby for the party of their choice for 5 minutes. Single, anonymous vote taken on simple ballot (heads down...hands raised works as well). Students will invariably choose Party 3 given the limitations of #1 (more of the same) and #2 (Red Scare).

However, the students will not know that they have just elected Adolf Hitler to be Chancellor of Germany as leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party.

The remainder of the lesson will be drawing conclusions comparing the politics of Germany in the 1930s with the political climate in the United States in 1932. Students will consider the following questions:

- Why would the German public be frustrated with the Weimar Republic (Social Democratic Party)?
- How does this compare with the public's ire directed at Hoover and the Republicans?
- Why would many people in both countries consider communism as a real alternative?
- Why would the public see Hitler and FDR differently?

As homework, students will read oral histories about Hitler and FDR. (From The American Century: Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster). Students will write a short reaction essay comparing and contrasting the views of citizens in the 1930s about their respective leaders.

Today's Relevance: Students are invited to discuss Barack Obama's election, message and popularity.

Enrichment: Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939 by Wolfgang Schivelbusch. (See review article by David Boaz from Reason Magazine Oct 2007)