



SECTION 1 Roosevelt Takes Office

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's character and experiences prepared him for the presidency of a nation in crisis.

Key Terms and Names

New Deal, polio, gold standard, bank holiday

Reading Strategy

Organizing As you read about Franklin Roosevelt's background, complete a graphic organizer similar to the one below by listing the early influences and experiences that helped shape Roosevelt as a politician.

Influences and Experiences	_____

Reading Objectives

- **Discuss** Franklin Roosevelt's early political career.
- **Explain** the worsening situation in the U.S. banking system in the early 1930s.

Section Theme

Individual Action Franklin Roosevelt's optimism, determination, and outgoing personality shaped his approach to politics.

Preview of Events



★ An American Story ★



Franklin D. Roosevelt as a young man

When Louis Howe was a child in Saratoga Springs, New York, a bicycle accident left his face scarred. As an adult and a reporter for his father's newspaper, he cheerfully described himself as "one of the four ugliest men in the state of New York." Howe dressed sloppily, perhaps to demonstrate how little importance he attached to appearance. He worked hard, however, and was respected for his reporting.

In the winter of 1911, Howe traveled to Albany to interview a Democratic state senator, Franklin Delano Roosevelt—or FDR, as he was called. Howe found himself fascinated by the tall, intense young man with the gold-rimmed glasses who paced back and forth in front of him, earnestly answering his questions. He admired the dashing appearance Roosevelt made.

During the interview Roosevelt declared his intention to challenge the party bosses. The usually skeptical Howe found himself believing the young legislator. "I made up my mind," Howe later recalled, "that nothing but an accident could keep him from becoming president."

—adapted from *The Crisis of the Old Order*

Roosevelt's Rise to Power

In mid-June 1932, with the country deep in the Depression, Republicans gathered in Chicago and nominated Herbert Hoover to run for a second term as president. The mood at the convention was somber. Delegates knew the Depression had turned many voters against Hoover.





Later that month, the Democrats also met in Chicago to choose their own candidate for president. It took four ballots and a great deal of negotiating, but the party eventually chose the popular governor of New York, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When he won the nomination, Roosevelt broke with tradition by flying to Chicago to deliver the first acceptance speech ever made to a nominating convention. Roosevelt's speech set the tone for his campaign:

“The appearance before a National Convention of its nominee for President . . . is unprecedented and unusual, but these are unprecedented and unusual times. . . . Let it also be symbolic that in so doing I broke traditions. Let it be from now on the task of our Party to break foolish traditions. . . . It is inevitable that the main issue of this campaign should revolve about . . . a depression so deep that it is without precedent. . . . Republican leaders not only have failed in material things, they have failed in national vision, because in disaster they have held out no hope. . . . I pledge you, I pledge myself, to a new deal for the American people.”

—quoted in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*

The next day, a cartoonist used the words “new deal” to stand for Roosevelt's program. From that point forward, Roosevelt's policies for ending the Depression became known as the **New Deal**. Roosevelt's confidence that he could make things better contrasted sharply with Hoover's apparent failure to do anything effective. On Election Day, Roosevelt won the Electoral College in a landslide, 472 votes to 59, and he received nearly 23 million votes to slightly less than 16 million for Hoover in the general election.

Picturing History

The Young Roosevelts Franklin Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt were married in 1905. They were distantly related through former president Theodore Roosevelt—her uncle and his cousin. [What sort of childhood did Franklin Roosevelt have growing up in Hyde Park, New York?](#)

Roosevelt's Background Franklin Roosevelt—a distant cousin of President Theodore Roosevelt—was born in 1882 to a wealthy New York family. Roosevelt grew up on his family's estate at Hyde Park on the Hudson River. There, Roosevelt learned to hunt, fish, ride horses, and sail, and he developed his lifelong commitment to conservation and a love of rural America. Roosevelt was educated at Harvard and Columbia Law School. While at Harvard, he became friends with Theodore Roosevelt's niece, Eleanor. Soon afterward, they were married.

Roosevelt was intensely competitive. He enjoyed winning and liked to be in control. He also liked being around people. His charming personality, deep rich voice, and wide smile expressed confidence and optimism. He could also be very persuasive. Overall, FDR's personality seemed made for a life in politics.

FDR's Early Political Career Shortly after leaving law school, Roosevelt plunged into politics. In 1910 he won a seat in the New York State Senate, where he earned a reputation as a progressive reformer willing to stand up to the party bosses. Roosevelt strongly supported Woodrow Wilson's presidential campaign in 1912. After winning the election, Wilson rewarded Roosevelt by appointing him assistant secretary of the navy, a position he held through World War I.





In 1920, hoping his name would win votes, the Democrats nominated Roosevelt as their candidate for vice president. After losing the election, Roosevelt temporarily withdrew from politics. The next year he came down with a fever and soon felt numbness in both legs. He had caught the dreaded and paralyzing disease known as **polio**. Although there was no cure, Roosevelt refused to give in. He began a vigorous exercise program to restore muscle control. Eventually, by wearing heavy steel braces on his legs, he was able to appear to walk by leaning on a cane and someone's arm and swinging his legs forward by moving his hips.

While recovering from polio, Roosevelt depended on his wife to keep his name prominent in the New York Democratic Party. Although shy, Eleanor Roosevelt became an effective public speaker. Her efforts during this time kept her husband's political career alive.

Linking Past & Present

Roosevelt Dime

Past: Search for a Cure

In 1921 Franklin Roosevelt contracted polio, a disease that paralyzed his legs. Few people knew of his physical limitations when he became president. His only freedom from braces came when he swam.

After Roosevelt established a foundation for polio victims at Warm Springs, Georgia, entertainer Eddie Cantor suggested that everyone in the country send a dime for polio research to the president. This campaign, which became known as the March of Dimes, produced 150,000 letters a day. In 1945 Congress voted to honor Roosevelt by placing his image on the dime.



Present: A Threat Eliminated

In the early 1950s, Dr. Jonas Salk discovered the polio vaccine. Today polio is no longer the threat to health that it once was.



Governor of New York By the mid-1920s, Roosevelt was again active in the Democratic Party. He became a strong supporter of New York's governor, Alfred E. Smith. When the Democratic Party nominated Smith for president in 1928, Smith urged Roosevelt to run for governor of New York. Roosevelt campaigned hard to demonstrate that his illness had not slowed him down, and he narrowly won the election.

Roosevelt's policies as governor made him very popular. He cut taxes for farmers and worked to reduce the rates charged by public utilities. In 1931, as the Depression worsened, Roosevelt convinced the New York legislature to set up a new state agency to help unemployed New Yorkers. The agency distributed over \$25 million in aid that provided relief to about 10 percent of New York's families.

Roosevelt's popularity in New York paved the way for his presidential nomination in 1932. Many Americans applauded his use of the government's power to help people in economic distress. Others believed that his struggle against polio had given him a better understanding of their hardships.

Perhaps most important, Americans saw in Roosevelt an energy and optimism that gave them hope despite the tough economic times. After Roosevelt became president, his serenity and confidence amazed many people. When one aide commented on his attitude, Roosevelt replied, "If you had spent two years in bed, trying to wiggle your big toe, after that anything else would seem easy."

Reading Check **Interpreting** What events in Roosevelt's life shaped his ideas and character?

Roosevelt Is Inaugurated

Although Roosevelt won the presidency in November 1932, the country's unemployed and homeless had to endure one more winter as they waited for his inauguration on March 4, 1933. All through the winter, unemployment continued to rise. Theater director Harold Clurman later wrote about the fear:

“Yes, we could smell the depression in the air, that historically cruel winter of 1932–33, which chilled so many of us like a world's end. . . . It was like a raw wind; the very houses we lived in seemed to be shrinking, hopeless of real comfort.”

—quoted in *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal*



“. . . the only thing we have to fear is fear itself . . .”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

Picturing History

Inspiring Words President Roosevelt used his first Inaugural Address of March 1933 to rally the nation’s spirits. **What problems had made the nation anxious and fearful?**

Meanwhile, bank runs greatly increased, further threatening the nation’s banking system. Some of the bank runs occurred because people feared Roosevelt would abandon the gold standard and reduce the value of the dollar in order to fight the Depression. Under the **gold standard**, one ounce of gold equaled a set number of dollars. To reduce the value of the dollar, the United States would have to stop exchanging dollars for gold. Many Americans, and many foreign investors with deposits in American banks, decided to take their money out of the banks and convert it to gold before it lost its value.

Across the nation, people stood in long lines with paper bags and suitcases, waiting to withdraw their money from banks. By March 1933, over 4,000 banks

had collapsed, wiping out 9 million savings accounts. In 38 states, governors declared **bank holidays**—closing the remaining banks before bank runs could put them out of business.

By the day of Roosevelt’s inauguration, most of the nation’s banks were closed. One in four workers was unemployed. The economy seemed paralyzed. Roosevelt knew he had to restore the nation’s confidence. “First of all,” the president declared in his Inaugural Address, “let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. . . . This nation asks for action, and action now!”

Reading Check Summarizing What was the nation’s condition when Roosevelt took office?

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

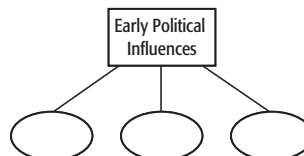
- Define:** **gold standard.**
- Identify:** New Deal, polio, bank holiday.
- Describe** the ways in which early influences and experiences shaped Roosevelt as a politician.

Reviewing Themes

- Individual Action** Why did Roosevelt’s election lead to an increase in bank runs?

Critical Thinking

- Explaining** How did FDR’s experiences as governor of New York prepare him for the presidency?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer like the one below to list early influences on Roosevelt’s political career.



Analyzing Visuals

- Analyzing Photographs** Study the photograph on this page. What did the president mean when he said “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself”?

Writing About History

- Persuasive Writing** Imagine you are living during the Depression. In your hometown, there has been a bank run. Write a letter to the president describing this event. Ask him to take steps to cure the bank crisis.