

Herbert Hoover's Legacy

What was Herbert Hoover's legacy?

Herbert Hoover is the only U.S. president, so far, born in Iowa. The son of Quaker parents in West Branch, Iowa, Hoover moved to Oregon as a youth to be raised in his uncle's family following the death of both of his parents. He attended Stanford University, studied geology and became a successful and wealthy mining engineer in operations all over the globe.

Commission for Relief in Belgium

Hoover was in London when World War I broke out. He headed a committee that distributed aid and helped Americans stranded in Great Britain return to the United States. His more significant assignment was heading the distribution of food to starving Belgians. Belgium had been invaded and occupied by the German army at the start of the war, and supplies of food were cut off. Under an arrangement between the warring powers, Germany and Britain allowed food to be imported to the Belgian people if it was distributed by a neutral power, the United States. Hoover headed up that effort through the Commission for Relief in Belgium. Distribution was later extended to needy populations in northern France suffering from the extended trench warfare. Hoover worked tirelessly and effectively to secure the food and then negotiate its delivery with government and military officials in the early years of a long war.

When the United States entered the fighting in 1917, Hoover returned to the United States to head the U.S. Food Administration. In a highly-publicized campaign, he persuaded American households to reduce their consumption of meat and grains to provide more food for the armed forces and U.S. allies. His reputation as a strong and effective administrator grew. At the end of the war, the U.S. Food Administration transitioned into the American Relief Administration to feed an estimated 400 millions of Europeans facing the possibility of starvation. Once again, his work staved off disaster and Herbert Hoover became a revered figure throughout Europe. In 1921, President Warren G. Harding appointed him to be secretary of commerce, a position he approached with his characteristic energy and enthusiasm. More than any of his predecessors in the position, Hoover promoted cooperation among American businesses to increase efficiency and eliminate waste. He also promoted the development of the radio and the automobile industry.

Herbert Hoover's Presidency

In 1928, Hoover was elected president of the United States in a landslide against New York Governor Al Smith. Throughout the 1920s, the manufacturing and business sectors of the economy prospered, although the agriculture sector did not. The Republican Party took credit for the good times and predicted continued prosperity. But that was not to be. After only six months of Hoover's term, the New York stock market crashed in 1929, the first step toward the nation's worst economic crisis. Banks failed and factories closed, throwing millions out of work. Farm prices, already low, dropped even lower, below the cost to produce them. Hoover's approach favored cooperation and voluntary efforts more than government regulation, but the need exceeded what voluntary agencies could provide. Families struggled, and many blamed Hoover. Camps of the homeless sprung up around the country and they were called Hoovervilles. When they covered themselves in newspapers to keep warm at night, the newspapers were called Hoover blankets. In farm states like Iowa, where farmers were losing their farms when they could not pay their taxes or loans, there were even some armed uprisings against authorities. Hoover recommended several programs trying to promote recovery, but they seemed inadequate to the extent of the challenge, and the public turned against one who had formerly been held in high esteem.

In 1932, Hoover lost his re-election bid to Franklin D. Roosevelt, who ushered in massive federal programs to combat the Great Depression. Hoover and the Republicans had cut taxes and government spending to try to keep the budget in balance, but Roosevelt greatly expanded government programs to put more money into the economy. Hoover strongly condemned programs that put the government in debt and opposed many of Roosevelt's New Deal efforts. He went into retirement after nearly two decades of active service in humanitarian

and executive service and authored several books on government and political affairs. After World War II, Hoover again accepted an invitation to contribute his considerable executive expertise. President Harry Truman asked Hoover to chair a commission to look at possible areas of reorganization of the massive federal government after its rapid expansion during the war. President Dwight D. Eisenhower also asked Hoover for his advice in managing the growing bureaucracy.

At first, historians tended to judge Hoover harshly for what they considered an inadequate federal response to the challenges of the Great Depression. However, some of the programs Hoover proposed were reconsidered as providing the foundation for an expanded government role. Hoover's achievement as a humanitarian re-emerged. At the Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, there are many examples of gifts that European children sent to him in gratitude for the role he played in providing food when they faced starvation. Hoover, as president, will continue to be controversial, but Hoover's reputation as a humanitarian will always be strong.

Supporting Questions

What was Herbert Hoover's legacy as a world humanitarian leader?

- [Letter from Herbert Hoover about Commission for Relief in Belgium, June 15, 1915 \(Document\)](#)
- [Colonel Haskell Reports to Herbert Hoover about Russian Relief, August 27, 1923 \(Document\)](#)
- ["Hoover the Humanitarian!," 1928 \(Document\)](#)
- [Correspondence between Harry S. Truman and Herbert Hoover about Postwar Efforts to Prevent Famine, May 24, 1945 \(Document\)](#)
- [Memo of Herbert Hoover's Talks with Argentina President Juan Peron, June 11, 1946 \(Document\)](#)

What was Herbert Hoover's legacy as President of the United States?

- ["Herbert Hoover and West Branch" Book, 1974 \(Document\)](#)
- [Inaugural Address of Herbert Hoover, March 4, 1929 \(Document\)](#)
- [Herbert Hoover's Response to a Question from the Press, October 24, 1930 \(Document\)](#)
- [Letter from Herbert Hoover to Herbert S. Crocker, May 21, 1932 \(Document\)](#)
- [Statement from Herbert Hoover about Emergency Relief and Construction Legislation, July 6, 1932 \(Document\)](#)
- [Herbert Hoover's Statement to the Press on Federal Activities for Employment during the Winter, 1930 \(Document\)](#)

*Printable Image and Document Guide

Additional Resources

"Uncommon Man" Speech by Herbert Hoover

"Uncommon Man" was one of the best known speeches delivered by Herbert Hoover. It was given during a fundraising event for Wilmington College in 1948, and it celebrated the importance of human achievement and excellence.

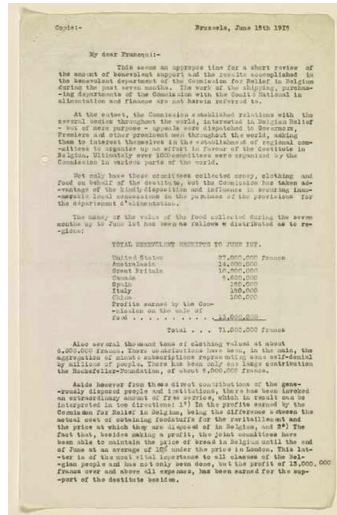
"Come On, Let's 'Hooverize'" Song

This Library of Congress resource is sheet music for a 1918 song called, "Come On, Let's 'Hooverize.'" It focuses on the concessions Hoover emphasized during World War I, and encourages Americans to do their part, such as cutting down on ham and pork, to help the war effort and relief being provided overseas.

Lou Henry Hoover's Comments on Her Husband's Career and Legacy

This is a letter written by Lou Henry Hoover, wife of Herbert Hoover, to her sons and grandchildren during the 1932 presidential campaign. In it, Lou Henry Hoover defends her husband's actions while president, and tries to combat allegations that he is "aloof and uncaring."

Letter from Herbert Hoover about Commission for Relief in Belgium, June 15, 1915



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Hoover, Herbert, "Herbert Hoover to Mr. E. Francqui," 15 June 1915

Description

This is a letter from Herbert Hoover to Émile Francqui, who was a Belgian soldier, diplomat, business man and philanthropist. Hoover is reviewing the success of the relief efforts of the Commission For Relief in Belgium, which he was in charge of, during its occupation by Germany in World War I.

[Transcript of Letter from Herbert Hoover about Commission for Relief in Belgium](#)

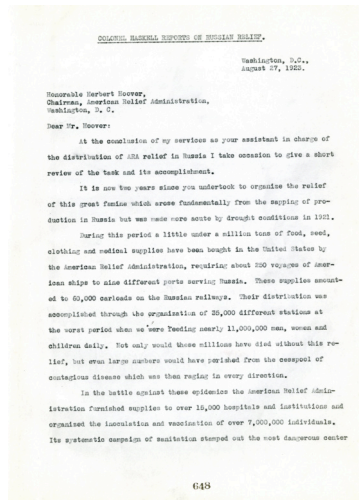
Source-Dependent Questions

- What do you believe is the overall purpose of this correspondence by Herbert Hoover?
- What textual evidence supports the claim that the Commission had been successful in the first seven months?
- Why was it important that the Commission, and the committees supporting the Commission, collected more than just money? What else would the people of Belgium need during this time of crisis?
- What evidence from this text can be used to define Herbert Hoover’s legacy as a humanitarian?

Citation Information

Hoover, Herbert, "Herbert Hoover to Mr. E. Francqui," 15 June 1915. Courtesy of Library of Congress

Colonel Haskell Reports to Herbert Hoover about Russian Relief, August 27, 1923



Courtesy of National Archives, Haskell, William N., "Colonel Haskell Reports on Russian Relief," 27 August 1923

Description

This review letter, dated Aug. 27, 1923, was from Colonel William N. Haskell to Herbert Hoover. Hoover, who oversaw the American Relief Administration, was contacted by Haskell about the completion of the Russian relief effort after World War I.

[Transcript of Colonel Haskell's Reports to Herbert Hoover about Russian Relief](#)

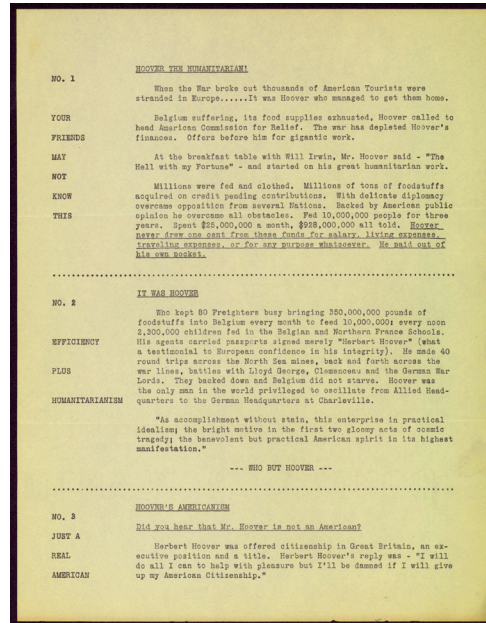
Source-Dependent Questions

- What was the general purpose of this letter written to Herbert Hoover? How do you think Colonel William Haskell felt about Hoover and his leadership and efforts? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
- What textual evidence supports the success of the relief effort in Russia?
- Compare this document to the [letter Herbert Hoover wrote about the relief effort in Belgium](#). What is similar about the relief efforts? What is different? Why were both relief efforts needed?

Citation Information

Haskell, William N., "Colonel Haskell Reports on Russian Relief," 27 August 1923. Courtesy of National Archives

“Hoover the Humanitarian!,” 1928



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1928

Description

The campaign literature contains information on Herbert Hoover's humanitarian efforts during World War I that was used during his presidential campaign in 1928. This pro-Hoover pamphlet focuses on his achievements in the mining industry and during World War I as food administrator for the federal government.

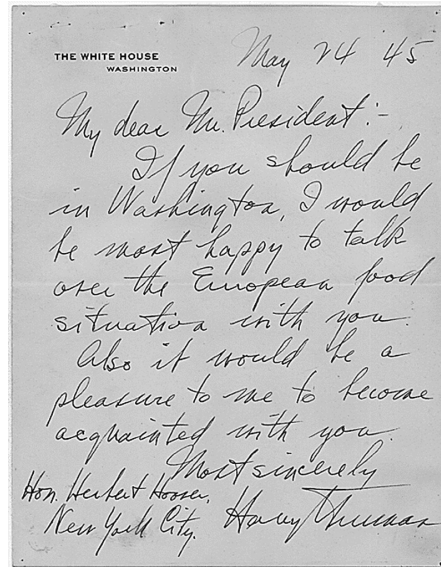
[Full Transcript for "Hoover the Humanitarian!"](#)

[Transcribed Excerpt from "Hoover the Humanitarian!"](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- How do excerpted section support Herbert Hoover's legacy as a humanitarian? Cite textual evidence to support your answer.
- Why would portraying Herbert Hoover as a humanitarian be a savvy political move for his presidential campaign?

Correspondence between Harry S. Truman and Herbert Hoover about Postwar Efforts to Prevent Famine, May 24, 1945



Courtesy of National Archives, Truman, Harry and Herbert Hoover, "Correspondence relating to Harry Truman inviting Herbert Hoover to the White House to discuss measures to avert famine in postwar Europe," 24 May 1945

Description

This first letter is an invitation from President Harry S. Truman to former-President Herbert Hoover to have a meeting to discuss his potential assistance to prevent post-World War II famine in Europe. Hoover responds to Truman and said he would agree to meet.

[Transcript of Correspondence between Harry S. Truman and Herbert Hoover](#)

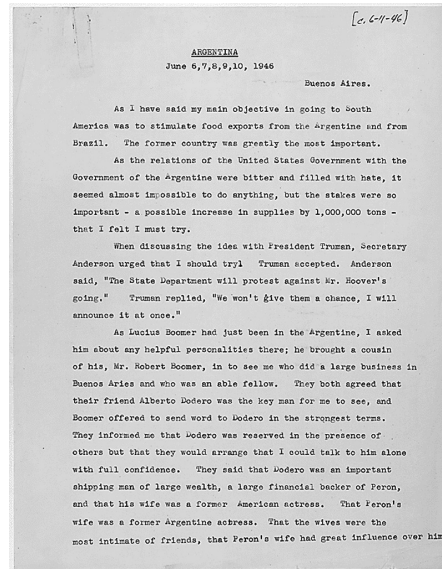
Source-Dependent Questions

- Based on the previous documents in this set, why do you believe President Harry Truman would want to make acquaintance with former President Herbert Hoover?
- Predict the importance of this invitation to meet, and its acceptance based on Herbert Hoover's work as a world humanitarian. How did this relationship help with the [Peron agreement](#) to release wheat outlined in this document?

Citation Information

Truman, Harry and Herbert Hoover, "Correspondence relating to Harry Truman inviting Herbert Hoover to the White House to discuss measures to avert famine in postwar Europe," 24 May 1945. Courtesy of National Archives

Memo of Herbert Hoover's Talks with Argentina President Juan Peron, June 11, 1946



Courtesy of National Archives, "Memoranda of Hoover's talks with Jaun Peron which freed 1.5 million tons of wheat for shipment to starving Europe in 1946," 11 June 1946

Description

The first 11 pages of this document is a report from Herbert Hoover on his attentions to seek a massive supply of wheat from Argentina's President Juan Peron. The last part of the document is a written record of his urging President Harry S. Truman to stop trade restrictions with Argentina in order to secure the wheat.

[Full Transcript of Memo of Herbert Hoover's Talks with Argentina President Juan Peron](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from the Memo of Herbert Hoover's Talks with Argentina President Juan Peron](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- Reference [Hoover's communication with President Truman](#). How did the relationship with President Truman and Hoover's past experience lead to the opportunity to help Argentina?
- Why did Herbert Hoover have an interest in helping Argentina?
- How did Hoover build the relationship with President Juan Peron? What did this relationship lead to in the end?

Citation Information

"Memoranda of Hoover's talks with Jaun Peron which freed 1.5 million tons of wheat for shipment to starving Europe in 1946," 11 June 1946. Courtesy of National Archives

“Herbert Hoover and West Branch” Book, 1974

HOOVER AND THE ECONOMY

Beginning with the Hoover administration, government was moving, willingly or unwillingly, into an entirely new role of responsibility for the economy.

Presidents and political parties found themselves dealing with economic problems so complex and rapidly changing as to defy easy comprehension and solution. Events forced Presidents into courses of economic action that were apparently contrary to their firm convictions and goals as expressed in their campaigns for election.

Herbert Hoover's record furnishes the first example. As a candidate in 1928, he stressed “vigorous co-operation by the government to promote economic welfare” and praised “the spirit of adventure, of individual initiative, and of individual enterprise.”

Hoover's assertion as President of the government's responsibility for the nation's economy represented a complete break with the thinking of all past Presidents, and the new philosophy has been embraced by all succeeding Presidents.

Lecturing at Harvard University in 1934, the late Walter Lippmann pointed out that Presidents Monroe, Van Buren, Buchanan, Grant and Cleveland served during depressions and all of them “thought it no part of their duty, and not within their power, to take charge of the economy and direct it through the storm.” But Mr. Hoover “regarded it as his obvious duty to take charge and to direct.”

Lippmann said that Mr. Hoover spent billions in protecting banks, insurance companies and railroads against bankruptcy, in subsidies for agriculture, and on public works. He used the nation's credit in an effort to relieve debtors and to restore prices. He sought to control production, raise wages, and stimulate international trade.

“Mr. Hoover tried to do virtually everything that Mr. (Franklin D.) Roosevelt did in his first year,” Lippmann said. “He moved more cautiously, he applied smaller doses of the medicine, he timed the doses differently, and he worked against constantly mounting political opposition. He was less lucky and he was less effective. But on the point which concerns us here which is that *laissez-faire** is dead and that the modern state has become responsible for the modern economy as a whole, Mr. Hoover is the best of all witnesses. For he acted on a doctrine which he professed to reject. There could be no better evidence of the degree to which the new doctrine is established.”

Lippmann expressed only his own opinion, of course, on what Hoover “professed to reject.” Hoover's 1928 campaign speeches pointed out the contrasts between private initiative and government ownership, with little reference to the areas between.

Yet, at one point in the campaign, Hoover said: “The very essence of equality of opportunity and of American individualism is that there shall be no domination by any group or combination in this republic, whether it be business or political. On the contrary, it demands economic justice as well as political and social justice. It is no system of *laissez-faire*.”

**laissez-faire*: A doctrine opposing governmental interference (as by regulation or subsidy) in economic affairs beyond the minimum necessary for the maintenance of peace and property rights . . . a policy of non-interference with individual freedom of choice and action.

Courtesy of Joan Liffing-Zug Bourret, Liffing Zug, Joan and John Zug, *Herbert Hoover and West Branch*, Mid-America Publishing Corp., 1974

Description

This book covers the history of Herbert Hoover, from his birth in West Branch, Iowa until his death in 1964. The excerpted sections featured above focus on Hoover's influence on the U.S. economy and his vision for the nation.

[Transcription of the “Herbert Hoover and West Branch” Book](#)

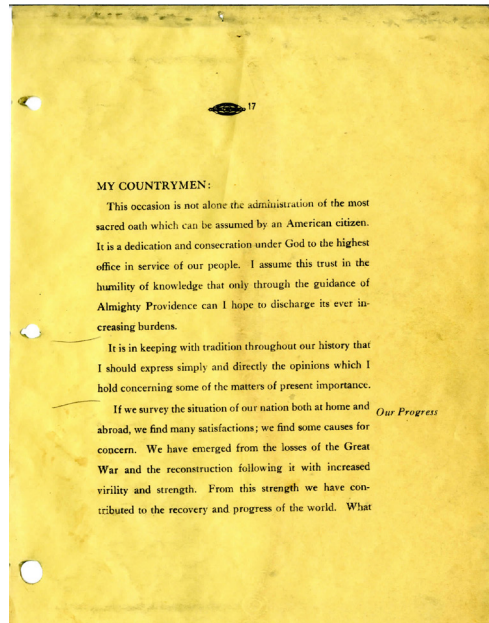
Source-Dependent Questions

- According to the text, how were Herbert Hoover's actions as president contrary to his political ideals that he campaigned on before his election?
- How were most of Hoover's ideas and potential policies met by opposing political figures? How did this hinder his efforts to lead the nation out of the Great Depression?
- How does this document portray Herbert Hoover's legacy as president of the United States? Cite textual evidence to support your claim.

Citation Information

Liffing Zug, Joan and John Zug, *Herbert Hoover and West Branch*, Mid-America Publishing Corp., 1974. Courtesy of Joan Liffing-Zug Bourret

Inaugural Address of Herbert Hoover, March 4, 1929



Courtesy of Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, Hoover, Herbert, 4 March 1929

Description

Newly-elected Herbert Hoover outlines his plans for his presidency in his inaugural address in 1929. His speech included speaking about the enforcement of the 18th amendment, which would be the prohibition of alcoholic beverages by declaring the production, transport and sale of alcohol illegal. He also spoke about the relationship between business and the government and what role the United States will play in world events.

[Full Transcript of President Herbert Hoover's Inaugural Address](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from President Herbert Hoover's Inaugural Address](#)

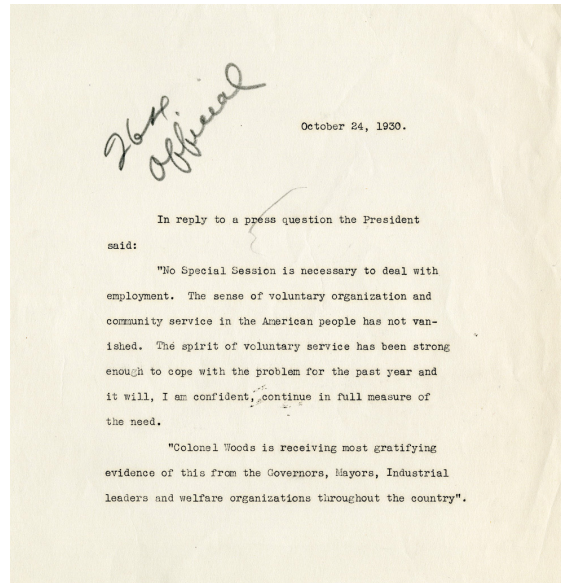
Source-Dependent Questions

- As you read the excerpted text, what do you feel were the overriding themes set forth by President Herbert Hoover in his speech? Support your answer with textual evidence.
- Based on this document and other readings from this source set, do you feel he was able to meet his own expectations as he carried out his term of office? Cite textual evidence or support from other readings in this set to support your claim.

Citation Information

Hoover, Herbert, 4 March 1929. Courtesy of Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum

Herbert Hoover's Response to a Question from the Press, October 24, 1930



Courtesy of National Archives, Hoover, Herbert, 21 May 1932

Description

This is a letter from Herbert Hoover to Herbert S. Crocker, President of the American Society of Civil Engineers, responding to the Society's suggestion to expand public works programs. Hoover outlines, in detail, his opposition to expanding public works and explains what he feels the government can do.

[Full Transcript of Letter from Herbert Hoover to Herbert S. Crocker](#)

[Transcribed Excerpts from the Letter from Herbert Hoover from Herbert S. Crocker](#)

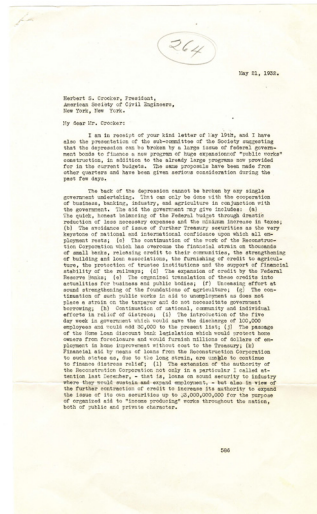
Source-Dependent Questions

- What was the distinction between "Public Works" programs and "Income-Producing Works" programs? Why would this be an important distinction to make for Hoover?
- What were President Herbert Hoover's reasons for not expanding public works during a time where unemployment was high and the national economy was struggling? Cite textual evidence from the document to support your answer.
- How does this document exemplify Hoover's legacy as president of the United States during the Great Depression?

Citation Information

Hoover, Herbert, 21 May 1932. Courtesy of National Archives

Letter from Herbert Hoover to Herbert S. Crocker, May 21, 1932



Courtesy of National Archives, Hoover, Herbert, 21 May 1932

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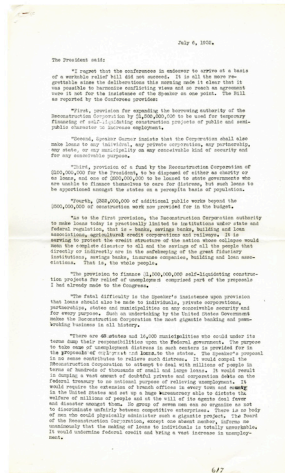
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Citation Information

Hoover, Herbert, 21 May 1932. Courtesy of National Archives

Statement from Herbert Hoover about Emergency Relief and Construction Legislation, July 6, 1932



Courtesy of National Archives, Hoover, Herbert, "Statement on Emergency Relief and Construction Legislation," 6 July 1932

Description

This document is President Herbert Hoover's statement of objections to the Garner-Wagner Bill, which was written to provide more federal assistance to private individuals and businesses with federal loans during the Great Depression, as well as expanding the public works programs.

[Transcript of Statement on Emergency Relief and Construction Legislation](#)

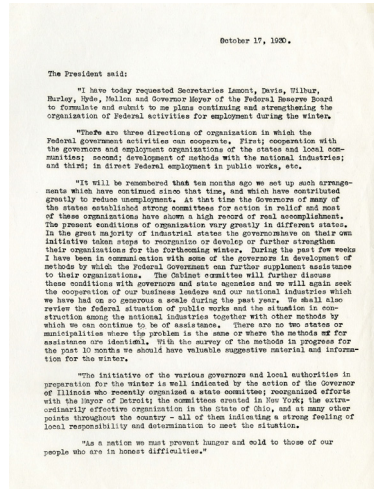
Source-Dependent Questions

- What were the main components that President Herbert Hoover did not agree with in the proposed bill?
- Why was Hoover against providing loans and expanding public works as outlined in the proposed bill? Speculate why his opinion might be viewed as unpopular. Use textual evidence to support your answer.
- How does this document contribute to Hoover's legacy as president of the United States? Cite textual evidence.

Citation Information

Hoover, Herbert, "Statement on Emergency Relief and Construction Legislation," 6 July 1932. Courtesy of National Archives

Herbert Hoover's Statement to the Press on Federal Activities for Employment, October 17, 1930



Courtesy of National Archives, Hoover, Herbert, "Herbert Hoover's Statement to the Press on Federal Activities for Employment during the Winter," 17 October 1930

Description

This document is President Herbert Hoover's statement informing the public that his administration's cabinet would be working to strengthen federal actions supporting winter employment.

[Transcript of Herbert Hoover's Statement to the Press on Federal Activities for Employment](#)

Source-Dependent Questions

- What did President Herbert Hoover highlight as successes in his programs up to this point in the government's efforts to get out of the Great Depression?
- Compare this document to [President Hoover's comments to the press](#) on October 24, 1930. What changed in the months between the two press statements?
- How did the approaches mentioned in this document match his goals he set forth in his [inaugural address](#)? Provide textual evidence from both documents to support your answer.

Citation Information

Hoover, Herbert, "Herbert Hoover's Statement to the Press on Federal Activities for Employment during the Winter," 17 October 1930. Courtesy of National Archives