

**TEACHING WITH ON-LINE PRIMARY SOURCES:  
DOCUMENTS FROM NARA**

**CAMPAIGNING IN 1928:  
CHICKENS IN POTS AND CARS IN BACKYARDS**

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While the military and political accomplishments of World War I were clearly limited, the war, nonetheless, established a foundation for unparalleled economic growth in the United States during the 1920s. A significant consumer economy grew as many Americans worked fewer hours, earned higher salaries, invested in the stock market, and bought everything from washing machines to Model T Fords. This culture of consumerism in the 1920s changed the politics of American society and set the tone for American attitudes about economic political issues for decades to come. In the early 1920s, President Warren G. Harding's policies were generally conservative, especially regarding taxes, tariffs, immigration restriction, labor rights, and business regulation. Continuing Republican policies, President Calvin Coolidge included federal tax cuts and high tariffs. The expansive economy of the 1920s was fueled by the use of factory machine manufacturing and standardized mass production. The economic boom also resulted from the effects of World War I on technology, scientific management, the rapid increase in worker productivity, the psychology of mass consumption (with installment credit) behind the purchase of radios, motion picture tickets, electric appliances, and automobiles. Certainly, federal policies that supported big business with high tariffs, cutbacks in the authority of the Federal Trade Commission to regulate unfair trade practices, and the reduction of corporate and personal income taxes contributed to the boom as well.

It was with this backdrop that Herbert Hoover and Al Smith squared off in the election of 1928. Hoover was born in Iowa and orphaned as a child. He began a career as a mining engineer soon after graduating from Stanford University in 1895. Within twenty years he had used his engineering knowledge and business skills to make a fortune as an independent mining consultant. In 1914, Hoover administered the American Relief Committee and during World War I he headed the Commission for Relief in Belgium and the U.S. Food Administration and was chairman of the Interallied Food Council. After the war he directed the American Relief Administration. Then Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt said of Hoover in 1920, "He is certainly a wonder and I wish we could make him President of the United States. There could be no better one." In 1919 Hoover founded the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University. As Secretary of Commerce in the Harding and Coolidge administrations from 1921 to 1929, Hoover was widely celebrated for his leadership. The man who had fed Belgium, had run the U.S. Food Administration, revolutionized the Department of Commerce, and ministered to victims of the 1927 Mississippi flood appeared the ideal candidate in 1928. Hoover seemed more practical than Woodrow Wilson, glowed with respectability compared to the Harding administration, was easily more inspired than

Coolidge, and was generally considered more “purely American” than his Democratic opponent, New York Governor Alfred E. Smith.

Smith, a colorful and charismatic Democrat from New York’s lower East Side, was the first Catholic in United States history to be nominated for President. And, while Smith’s Catholicism was attacked by some nativist groups, in his memoir Hoover states that “Governor Smith unwittingly fanned the flame in an address in Oklahoma against intolerance. He insisted that religious faith did not disqualify any man from public office. He was right. But up to that moment it had been an underground issue.”

In any case, the election of 1928 was a contest between two self-made men, both “Horatio Alger” stories that celebrated rugged American individualism. Very similar to the 1928 Democratic platform, Hoover’s New Day platform included shorter working hours for labor, additional public works, and a Federal Farm Board to assist hard-pressed farmers. In addition, the candidates agreed upon reform of judicial procedure and the prison system; the promotion of child welfare; better housing; the elimination of national wastes; better organization of the Federal Government; control of immigration; development of water resources; and oil conservation. The one major issue that divided the candidates was Prohibition: Hoover supported the Eighteenth Amendment’s ban on the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, but Smith pressed for its repeal.

The Hoover campaign used a variety of slogans in 1928 including “Vote for Prosperity,” “Lest We Forget” (referring to Hoover’s World War I relief work), and “Who but Hoover?” But other slogans were introduced by Hoover supporters, often without direct input from him. Hoover made several very optimistic statements during the campaign, including “We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land,” but he never promised “a chicken in every pot.”

Nonetheless, the Republican National Committee pounced on the “chicken in every pot” slogan and published it in newspaper advertisements across the country. The featured document is an example that appeared in a number of newspapers during the Herbert Hoover presidential campaign in the fall of 1928. It detailed how the Republican administrations of Harding and Coolidge “reduced hours and increased earning capacity; silenced discontent; put the proverbial ‘chicken in every pot, and a car in every backyard,’ to boot.” The ad continues by asserting that previous Republican administrations had also made “the Republican Party the party of democracy, equality, opportunity; supported national development, not sectional interests; built better homes, more skyscrapers; passed more laws that benefited, regulated and purified immigration; and filled the working man’s pail, gasoline tank and generalized the use of time-saving devices that released women from the thrall of domestic drudgery.” The previous Democrats, according to the ad, had “impoverished and demoralized the railroads, led packing plants and tire factories into receivership, squandered billions on impractical programs, issued billions on scraps of paper to deflate foreign debt and then left to the Republican Party the job of mopping up the mess.” Finally, the ad contended, “The Republican Party rests its case on a record of stewardship and performance and its Presidential and Congressional candidates stand for election on a platform of sound

practice, Federal vigilance, high tariffs, Constitutional integrity, the conservation of natural resources, honest and constructive measures for agricultural relief, sincere enforcement of the laws, and the right of all citizens, regardless of faith or origin, to share in the benefits of opportunity and justice." A vote for Hoover would be a vote for continued prosperity.

The pre-election Hearst Newspapers poll predicted that Hoover would get 60 percent of the women's vote and 56 percent of the men's vote. He won 58 percent of the popular vote and garnered 444 electoral votes to Smith's 87. Interestingly, Smith's totals were partly a result of both anti-Catholic and pro-Catholic bias. Additionally, his campaign theme song, "The Sidewalks of New York," hardly appealed to voters in rural America as Smith's results were also affected by a decade of anti-urban bias. Smith carried only seven states, six in the "Solid South" and Massachusetts. He even lost his home state of New York, where reform Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt won the governorship. While dormant politically during most of the 1920s, women made the election of 1928 the "Year of the Woman Voter." Hoover was endorsed by the National Woman's Party, primarily because of his leadership of the Food Administration and his support of Prohibition. According to Hoover, the issues that defeated Smith were the general prosperity of the decade, Smith's support of the repeal of Prohibition, farm tariffs, Smith's association with Tammany Hall, and his "snuggling up" with the Socialists. Hoover concluded that Smith would have lost by a wider margin had he been Protestant.

Seven months after Hoover was inaugurated, the stock market crashed. While contrary to Hoover and his party's policies, it became clear that the subsequent economic depression could not be curbed without government intervention. Hoover insisted that the federal budget remain balanced as he cut taxes and expanded public-works spending. Unfortunately, he also signed the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, which raised tariffs on over 20,000 items, and later the 1932 Revenue Act, which increased taxes and fees (including postage rates). These acts, along with the Federal Reserve's tight money policy, are now generally considered major economic and political miscalculations that may have deepened the depression.

[For access to the document, visit [www.archives.gov/research/arc/](http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/). After clicking the yellow search button, type the identifying ARC #187095 into the keyword box and check the box for "descriptions linked to digital copies" just below the keyword box. This document is from the Herbert Hoover Papers, 1913-64, at NARA's Herbert Hoover Presidential Library in West Branch, IA, and may be printed and duplicated in any quantity.]

## Teaching Suggestions

### 1. Focus Activity with Document Analysis

Provide students with a copy of the document. Also supply students with a copy of the document analysis worksheet found at [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html). Ask students in pairs

to analyze the document by completing the worksheet. Then guide a discussion based on the questions from the worksheet. From this article and other sources, present students with information about Hoover's economic policies and actions after the election, and ask them to discuss how those might affect their analysis of the document.

## **2. Brainstorming Activity: Politics and Economics**

Close analysis of the featured document (see #1 above) reveals that this political advertisement was primarily about economic issues. Prominently on the document, there is the promise of a "chicken in every pot" and "a car in every backyard." Keep a list on the board or overhead as students brainstorm ways in which that promise applies today. In other words, how does the promise translate into 2006 economic terms: an iPod in every ear, a 45-inch plasma television in every living room, or a prepaid college education? What are the symbols of economic prosperity today? When the brainstorming is exhausted, ask students in small groups to compare the list on the board or overhead with the other economic issues in the advertisement, and ask each group to report their conclusions orally.

## **3. Current Events Activity: Writing Political Platforms**

Explain to students how and why political party platforms are written. Supply them with a copy of the featured document and the Republican platform from 1928 (visit [www.presidency.ucsb.edu](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu) for example). Use NARA's document analysis worksheet at [www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/document.html) to allow small groups to compare the documents. Lead a discussion that examines the similarities and differences. To conclude this activity, ask students in two large groups to write political platforms for the Republican and Democratic parties in 2008. Allow class time for the two groups to compare their issues and positions.

## **4. Small Group Drawing Connections Activity: Creating a Political Advertisement**

Supply students with a copy of the featured document. Divide the class into small groups. Ask half of the small groups to each create a political advertisement for the Democratic Party platform for 1928 in the exact same format as the featured document. Ask the other half of the small groups to each do the same for the Republican Party for 1932. Allow class time for all of the small groups to share their advertisements.

## **5. Current Events Activity: Platforms from 1928 to 2004**

Provide students with copies of the Republican and Democratic platforms from 2004 (visit [www.gop.com/](http://www.gop.com/) and [www.democrats.org/](http://www.democrats.org/)). After students have read the materials and reviewed the featured document, lead a discussion that compares the "planks" of the 2004 platforms with statements in the advertisement. As the advertisement was submitted to the newspapers by the Republican National Committee, ask students to research the role played by the Democratic and Republican national committees and other "unofficial" political campaign groups in the campaign of 2004. Allow class time to guide students in discussion of their findings on the impact of political party organizations on candidates.

**6. Cross-Curricular Activity: Geography and Political Campaigning**

In the elections of 1928, the Democrat Smith carried the states of the "Solid South" and Massachusetts. Explain to students the origins of the term "Solid South" and its impact on elections since the Civil War. Then, to help students understand how political party voting can follow geographic factors, assign each student (or each small group depending on class size) a presidential election from 1928-2004. For each election, ask them to create an electoral map of the United States that shows the states the Republicans won in red and the ones the Democrats won in blue. Allow class time for each student to report on his or her election map, and then lead a class discussion that analyzes how the red and blue states have shifted. Help students examine each election for an understanding of how political issues relate to geographic factors.

**7. Project Documentary Oral History Activity: Remembering the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression**

The featured document serves as a pivotal point between one of the economically best times and one of the worst times in American history: While there was tremendous prosperity for many Americans in the 1920s, there was economic tragedy for most Americans in the 1930s. Explain to students that one of the most interesting aspects of these two decades was how diversely Americans were affected. Ask students in small groups to select either the 1920s or 1930s, and develop a list of ten or fewer questions they would like to ask someone who experienced that decade. Help students locate local individuals who would be willing to participate in an interview about their experiences during either decade, and ask students to record the responses. Allow class time for the groups to report their findings, and create a list that reflects the variety of experiences. Note: The Smithsonian Oral History Project might be useful at [www.si.edu/archives/ihd/ihda.htm](http://www.si.edu/archives/ihd/ihda.htm).

**8. Extended Cross-Curricular Activity: Mass Media and Political Campaigns**

The newspaper advertisement in the featured document is a good example of an early use of the mass media in American political campaigns. To provide background information for students, ask journalism and media colleagues to develop topics for a series of two or three thirty-minute lectures with discussions on the use of media in political campaigns. For further background information, set aside a class period for a panel of local reporters from newspaper, radio, and television to discuss the characteristics of the use of their media in political campaigns. Allow time for students to ask panel members questions. Finally, in an analytical essay of two or three pages, ask students to evaluate the impact of media use in political campaigns based on the background information from the lectures and discussions and the panel presentation. It might be useful to suggest that in their essays students examine the effect that mass media has on basic democratic principles.

## REVIEWS

**Paul R. Waibel.** *Martin Luther: A Brief Introduction to His Life and Works.* Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2005. Pp. xi; 139. Paper, \$12.95. ISBN 0-88295-231-5.

Martin Luther remains an intriguing and confounding figure: He confronted—head on—issues that concern us still, and we haven't stopped debating his significance. Now we have a new biography that has some value for teachers and students but is ultimately disappointing. Among its virtues are its brevity, student-friendly explanations (e.g., of purgatory and indulgences), and a 23-page annotated appendix of Luther's writings; it is also strong on theology. But it offers no new information or interpretations, the narrative is based on a combination of secondary sources and select printed documents, and key subjects and views are either ignored or given short shrift, which is not surprising in so brief a book. There are flashes of sophisticated understanding, especially on theological distinctions and issues (e.g., the significance of the 95 Theses and key treatises), but in other places the text is short on analysis and nuance. For example, Luther's decision to become a monk instead of a lawyer, following his narrowly escaping being struck by lightning, is explained simply by his need to keep the vow—made as he cowered in fear—whereas the addition of context would have explained more; Luther's debt to his predecessors is minimized; the discussion of "justification by faith" slights the significance of Luther's appending "alone" to the concept.

My reservations, however, cover a wider swath. A lot of research has been done in recent decades on Luther and women, marriage, and the family, but these subjects are ignored, as this is primarily a theological life. Although in a footnote Waibel states that recent scholarship questions the veracity of Luther's posting his 95 Theses, he says nothing about that scholarship and otherwise treats the legend as fact. This is a shortcoming, as the difference is significant for our understanding of Luther and the course of the Reformation; also, nothing is said about the unauthorized translation of the Theses into German and their subsequent circulation. The role of the printing press is acknowledged but not the critical contribution of Lucas Cranach.

While Waibel shows us a flawed, human Luther, he also serves as an apologist. In his otherwise effective chapter on Luther's writings on peasants and Jews, the author wonders "about Luther's mental state" at the time he wrote his venomous diatribes, but this hypothesis is posed, not explored. We might not be able to place Luther on a psychiatrist's couch, but Waibel could have examined why Luther went overboard against peasants in revolt and Jews all the while, during the last two decades of his life, he was able to write dozens of treatises so rationally. Marius and Oberman's theories on Luther's vitriol are presented, but Waibel is mostly embarrassed by this part of his great man's legacy. Luther, to me, was an ideologue and an extremist. After he found his "truth," he allowed for neither other truths nor compromise. Luther also had a bad temper, which, along with his fear that the Last Days had begun, intensified his anger