

**Volume 14**

**Number 071**

**Presidential Election, 1932 - I**

**Lead: Mired in the worst economic depression in the nation's history, the United States faced a choice in 1932 between cold administrative competence and bold political inspiration. It was not even close.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: After a post-war decade of rising, though unevenly distributed, prosperity, America entered the election season of 1928 with great expectations for many more years of happy times. The Republicans claimed full**

**responsibility for the nation's exuberant fortunes and nominated the technocrat and Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover to carry their standard against the Happy Warrior, Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York. Despite widespread agreement with Smith's opposition to Prohibition, the electorate was still skeptical of electing a Roman Catholic to the nation's top office and generally satisfied with what it perceived as Republican economic stewardship. Hoover was elected in a landslide.**

**When everything began to fall apart less than a year after Hoover's inaugural, the stock market crash and the subsequent years of the Great**

**Depression seemed to many to have Republican and Hoover written all over them. As the nation began to prepare for the election of 1932, it was hard to imagine that the President and his party could be successful in the face of a driving Democratic headwind, indeed hurricane.**

**Historian Richard Norton Smith has called Herbert Clark Hoover, “an uncommon man.” He built his reputation and a vast fortune before turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as an international mining engineer. Hoover rescued American tourists stranded in Europe at the beginning of World War I, ran the U.S. Food Administration during the war and**

**helped feed a hungry Europe after the war. After several years in the Coolidge cabinet he was nominated and elected President just as the world began to collapse and Hoover seemed to friend and foe alike to not know what to do.**

**He was a conservative, constitutionally resistant to state intervention in the marketplace. Although he did attempt to help business recover with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, much modified and weakened by his enemies in Congress, promises of direct aid to individuals ran against his grain. His approach to the Depression seemed to be symbolized by his expulsion of the Bonus**

**Marchers from Washington during the summer before the election. He was a decent, honorable man caught in a maelstrom only partly of his own creation and Hoover was a terrible speaker. Above all, he had the misfortune in a time of great agony and suffering to be matched against, or shall we say outmatched by, a man, whom he did not respect, but who simply blew him away. Next time: Happy Days Are Here Again.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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