



Document A: 1931 Advertisement

This 1931 advertisement appeared in *Literary Digest*, a popular weekly magazine. The President's Organization on Unemployment Relief, a government group that helped coordinate President Hoover's response to the Great Depression, wrote the advertisement.

Of course WE CAN DO IT!

We dug the Panama Canal, didn't we? And they said we couldn't do that.

We put an army in France four months after we entered the World War, didn't we? And surprised the world.

Now we've got a tough one to crack right here in our own back yard.

Men are out of work. Our men. Our neighbors. Our citizens. Honest, hard-working folk.

They want jobs. They're eager to work. But there aren't enough jobs to go 'round. Somebody's got to tide them over.

Who's going to do it? The people who dug that ditch. The people who went to France, or bought Liberty Bonds, or went without sugar—Mr. and Mrs. John K. American.

That means you—and *you*—and Y O U!—every one of us who is lucky enough to have a job.

We're going to share our luck with the folks out of work, aren't we? Remember—there's no National fund they can turn to for relief. It's up to us! And we've got to dig deeper than we did last winter.



But if we all dig deep enough we can keep a roof over every head, food in every pantry, fuel on every fire, and warm clothing on every needy man, woman and child in America.

That will beat Old Man Depression and lead the way to better days. Can we do it? Of course we can do it. Give . . . and give generously.

WHERE TO GIVE: There is no National Agency through which you may contribute. The way for you to give is through your *local* welfare and relief organizations, through your Community Chest or through your emergency unemployment committee if you have one.

THE PRESIDENT'S ORGANIZATION ON UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF,
Walter S. Gifford, Director

COMMITTEE ON MOBILIZATION OF RELIEF RESOURCES, *Owen D. Young*, Chairman

The President's Organization on Unemployment Relief is non-political, and non-sectarian. Its purpose is to aid local welfare and relief agencies everywhere to provide for local needs. All facilities for the nation-wide program, including this advertisement, have been furnished to the Committee without cost.

Source: Advertisement from *Literary Digest*, a weekly magazine, November 21, 1931.

Contextualizing

1. How did this approach to relief compare to earlier American ideas about helping the poor?

Close Reading

2. The poster says, "Of course we can do it!" Who is "we"? What is "it"? What is the poster trying to do?
3. Pick one phrase or symbol from the advertisement that is meant to persuade the reader. Identify your choice and then explain how it persuades.



Document B: Long

Senator Huey Long, governor of Louisiana from 1928-1932, was well known for his powerful speeches and radical politics. In his “Share the Wealth” speech, he outlined his plan for restoring economic strength through new laws. This plan became the foundation for more than 25,000 Share Our Wealth societies across America with more than 4.5 million members by 1935.

People of America: In every community get together at once and organize a share-our-wealth society—Motto: Every man a king

Principles and platform:

1. To limit poverty by providing that every deserving family shall share in the wealth of America for not less than one third of the average wealth, thereby to possess not less than \$5,000 free of debt.
2. To limit fortunes to such a few million dollars as will allow the balance of the American people to share in the wealth and profits of the land.
3. Old-age pensions of \$30 per month to persons over 60 years of age who do not earn as much as \$1,000 per year or who possess less than \$10,000 in cash or property, thereby to remove from the field of labor in times of unemployment those who have contributed their share to the public service.
4. To limit the hours of work to such an extent as to prevent overproduction and to give the workers of America some share in the recreations, conveniences, and luxuries of life.
5. To balance agricultural production with what can be sold and consumed according to the laws of God. . . .
6. To care for the veterans of our wars.
7. Taxation to run the Government to be supported, first, by reducing big fortunes from the top. . . .

We propose to help our people into the place where the Lord said was their rightful own and no more. . . .

There is nothing wrong with the United States. We have more food than we can eat. We have more clothes and things out of which to make clothes than we can wear. We have more houses and lands than the whole 120 million can use if they all had good homes. So what is the trouble? Nothing except that a handful of men have everything and the balance of the people have nothing if their debts were paid. There should be every man a king in this land flowing with milk and honey instead of the lords of finance at the top and slaves and peasants at the bottom.

Source: Excerpt from Senator Huey Long’s “Share the Wealth” speech, The Congressional Record, February 5, 1934.

Close Reading

1. What is the central trouble in America according to Long?
2. What program does Long recommend for old-age pensions? How does he think old-age pensions help the problem of unemployment?

Corroborating

3. What were different views about how to help the poor during the Great Depression? Use specific examples and quotes from the 1931 advertisement and this document in your answer.



Document C: Townsend Pamphlet

Francis E. Townsend, an unemployed doctor, introduced this plan in 1933 in a California newspaper. He and others soon started an organization called Old Age Revolving Pensions, Inc. to publicize and build support for the plan. By 1935, the organization had more than five million members and presented a petition for the plan to President Roosevelt with 20 million signatures, more than 10% of the entire American population.

The Townsend Plan

. . . in Brief

Have the National Government enact Legislation to the effect that all citizens of the United States—man or woman—over the age of 60 years may retire on a pension of \$200 per month on the following conditions:

1. That they engage in no further labor, business or profession for gain.
2. That their past life is free from habitual criminality.
3. That they take oath to, and actually do spend, within the confines of the United States, the entire amount of their pension within thirty days after receiving same.

Have the National Government create the revolving fund by levying a general sales tax; have the rate just high enough to produce the amount necessary to keep the Old Age Revolving Pensions Fund adequate to pay the monthly Pensions. Have the act so drawn that such sales tax can only be used for the Old Age Revolving Pensions Fund.

OLD AGE REVOLVING PENSIONS, INC.

148 American Avenue Long Beach, California

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Source: Excerpt from a pamphlet published by *Old Age Revolving Pensions, Inc.*, 1934, Long Beach, California.

Sourcing

1. Who wrote and published this document? Who is the intended audience?

Close Reading

2. What is the main goal of the Townsend Plan? Briefly list the four requirements someone would have to meet to be included in this program.

Contextualizing

3. Why might the plan have had so many supporters in 1934? Consider the events of the time and the plan's contents.



Document D: Poster

The Social Security Act of 1935 started a national old-age pension for workers who earned wages. This meant that at age 65 these workers could retire and receive monthly payments from the government. To pay for this program, workers and employers each paid a tax of 1 percent on the first \$3,000 that a worker earned in a year. The Social Security Board distributed this poster in 1936 and 1937 to publicize this new program.

A monthly check to you—

For the rest of your life . . .
beginning when you are 65

Get your Social Security account number
promptly

APPLICATIONS ARE BEING
DISTRIBUTED AT ALL WORK PLACES

WHO IS ELIGIBLE . . . everybody working for salary or wages (with only a few exceptions, such as agriculture, domestic service, and government work). Applications for Social Security accounts are available through employers. If you do not get one from your employer, ask for one at the post office.

HOW TO RETURN APPLICATION

1. Hand it back to your employer, *or*
2. Hand it to any labor organization of which you are a member, *or*
3. Hand it to your letter carrier, *or*
4. Deliver it to local post office, *or*
5. Mail it in a sealed envelope addressed: Postmaster, Local

Do it now. No postage needed.

—Social Security Board

Information may be obtained at any post office



Source: Social Security Board, 1936.

Close Reading

1. What two requirements did people need to meet to be included in Social Security?
2. How does the image on the poster represent the Social Security program? Consider the outstretched hand and the background image.

Corroborating

3. How is the program advertised here different from the one described in the Townsend pamphlet?



Document E: NAACP

President Roosevelt sent his Social Security bill, named the “Economic Security Act,” to Congress in January 1935. Congress held committee hearings on the bill. Here, a representative of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a group dedicated to advancing the rights of African Americans, testifies before Congress about how the bill excludes certain groups of people.

Mr. Houston: The point that I am making is that in order to qualify for the old-age annuity there is a provision that taxes must be paid on behalf of this person prior to the day when he reaches 60 years.

Now, for the benefit of Negroes, I want to inquire who would be benefited or excluded by that provision?

First, and very serious, Negro share croppers and cash tenants would be excluded. I take it that I do not need to argue to this committee the fact that of the Negro population and of the population of the country generally, your Negro share cropper and your Negro cash farm tenant are just about at the bottom of the economic scale. He is not employed. There is no relation necessarily of master and servant by which he gets wages on which a tax could be levied. Therefore this population is excluded from the entire benefits of the old-age annuity, and that represents approximately, according to the 1930 census, 490,000 Negroes.

Next: Domestic servants are . . . excluded from the act . . . because the system of employing domestic servants is so loose. . . .

In addition to that, from the standpoint of present persons unemployed . . . this old-age annuity does not provide for these . . . I do not need to argue to the committee that Negroes have suffered from unemployment more than any other class of the community. . . .

Source: Excerpt from the Statement of Charles H. Houston, representing the NAACP, to the House Ways and Means Committee on the Economic Security bill, February 1, 1935. Washington, D.C.

Close Reading

1. What four groups does Houston name as excluded from old age pensions?

Contextualizing

2. What other groups of people besides African Americans might be excluded given these exceptions?

Corroborating

3. Date this document and the previous poster. What can you tell about whether the Social Security Act was modified to address Houston’s concerns?



Document F: FDR

President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave this speech on August 14, 1935 when he signed the Social Security Act.

Today a hope of many years' standing is in large part fulfilled. The civilization of the past hundred years, with its startling industrial changes, has tended . . . to make life insecure. Young people have come to wonder what would be their lot when they came to old age. The man with a job has wondered how long the job would last.

This social security measure gives at least some protection to thirty millions of our citizens who will reap direct benefits through unemployment compensation, through old-age pensions and through increased services for the protection of children and the prevention of ill health.

We can never insure one hundred percent of the population against one hundred percent of the hazards and vicissitudes of life, but we have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against the loss of a job and against poverty-ridden old age.

This law, too, represents a cornerstone in a structure which is being built but is by no means complete. It is a structure intended to lessen the force of possible future depressions. It will act as a protection to future Administrations against the necessity of going deeply into debt to furnish relief to the needy. . . . It is, in short, a law that will take care of human needs and at the same time provide the United States an economic structure of vastly greater soundness. . . .

If the Senate and the House of Representatives in this long and arduous session had done nothing more than pass this Bill, the session would be regarded as historic for all time.

Source: August 14, 1935, excerpt from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech, Washington, D.C.

Sourcing

1. Who gave this speech and when? Who is the intended audience? How might that influence the content and tone of the speech?

Close Reading

2. What four programs are included in the Social Security bill? How does Social Security represent FDR's program of "relief, recovery, and reform"? For each of the three words, write one quote or example that illustrates connections.

Corroborating

3. How might NAACP representative Houston argue with this speech? Select a line from the speech and explain how Houston might disagree.



Document G: LA Times

On August 16, 1935, the Los Angeles Times published this editorial statement about the flaws in the Social Security Act.

“Social Security”

With the intents of the so-called Social Security Act, an omnibus or shotgun measure which the President signed Wednesday, there can be no quarrel. Everybody wants to see the aged and infirm properly cared for, everybody sympathizes with the man out of work through no fault of his own. The theory of aid to dependent children, child health, aid to the blind, vocational education, encounters little or no opposition.

That the social security bill as passed solves any of these problems satisfactorily, or even tolerably, is however, extremely unlikely. That it imposes new, large burdens on industry and the general taxpayer, at a time when to do so retards recovery, is certain.

The bill is so voluminous, so involved and complicated, and so all-containing, that discussion of it is difficult and conclusions reached must be tentative. Parts of it are of very dubious constitutionality...

What is to be done, precisely, with the funds collected, does not seem to have had sufficient study...

The whole subject should have been put over at least to another Congress, for further study. There should have been at least three, probably five or six, separate bills, instead of lumping the whole subject into one so complicated that the public could not possibly comprehend it. Done as it has been, this bill probably resembles a proper and wise measure about as a statue by the village stonecutter resembles one by Michelangelo.

Source: August 16, 1935, excerpt from a *Los Angeles Times* editorial, Los Angeles, California.

Close Reading

1. According to this article, what are the problems this bill was intended to address?
2. What is the *LA Times'* main critique of the bill? What are four specific aspects of the bill that they object to?

Contextualizing

3. How does this critique compare with either Houston's critique of the Act OR more general critiques made of the New Deal in the 1930s?



Document H: Stealing

Americans sent thousands of letters to the White House during FDR's presidency. On average, more than 5,000 letters arrived daily. This letter refers to the "forgotten man," the title of a radio address that FDR gave on April 17, 1932. The "forgotten man" became a phrase adopted by many Americans.

[no address]

Jan 18., 1937

[Dear Mrs. Roosevelt] I . . . was simply astounded to think that anyone could be nitwit enough to wish to be included in the so called social security act if they could possibly avoid it. Call it by any name you wish it, in my opinion, (and that of many people I know) is nothing but downright stealing. . . .

Personally, I had my savings so invested that I would have had a satisfactory provision for old age. Now thanks to his [FDR's] desire to "get" the utilities I cannot be sure of anything, being a stockholder, as after business has survived his merciless attacks (if it does) insurance will probably be no good either. . . .

Then the president tells them they should hire more men and work shorter hours so that the laborers, who are getting everything now raises etc. can have a "more abundant life." That simply means taking it from the rest of us in the form of taxes or otherwise. . . .

Believe me, the only thing we want from the president . . . is for him to balance the budget and reduce taxes. That, by the way, is a "mandate from the people" that isn't getting much attention.

I am not an "economic royalist," just an ordinary white collar worker at \$1600 per. Please show this to the president and ask him to remember the wishes of the forgotten man, that is, the one who dared to vote against him. We expect to be tramped on but we do wish the stepping would be a little less hard.

Security at the price of freedom is never desired by intelligent people.

M.A. [female]

Source: Excerpt from a letter sent to Eleanor Roosevelt by an anonymous woman, January 18, 1937.

Sourcing

1. What does the author tell us about herself? When she uses quotations, whom is she quoting and what does her extensive use of them suggest?

Close Reading

2. What was M.A. counting on to support her in old age? And why has she lost faith that this will support her?

Contextualizing

3. How does this author generally feel about the New Deal? How does her phrase "security at the price of freedom" capture those feelings?



Document I: Mirage

This is another letter sent to the White House. This writer voices her thoughts about how Social Security should work. [Please note that we have changed some of the punctuation and spelling in the letter so it will be easier to read.]

Ypsilante Michigan, Jan 24, 1936

Hon Pres. and Mrs Roosevelt—Washington D. C.

Dear friends—A few words from one whom you represent. When Pres. Roosevelt gave his promise to drive “The Money Changers from the Temple,” listeners had great hope that at last the common people of the nation would have a hearing but so far he seems zealously to be watching over the interests of financiers and capitalists and the common people are allowed to view a mirage with wonderful promises which disappear on approach. . . . Pres R. security program is ridiculed and to all of us it is a great disappointment. . . . We all know streams of money have been steadily flowing into Wall Street from all the corners of this nation and it is by the Federal Gov’t alone which has access to all these treasuries that Old Age Pensions should be paid. . . . There is as much wealth as ever, but where is it?—In the hands of a comparatively few. . . . Why cannot Pres. R. understand the people know this, and are demanding a re-distribution of wealth instead of a program of debt-debt-debts-for unborn generations to pay. Why is he not taxing the fountain heads of this wealth. . . . The Townsend Plan while it looked like a fairy tale or the Millennium at first . . . as we think of it and examine its details we believe it is workable if really tried. . . .

. . . . It is the failure to provide . . . purchasing power that has wrecked our economic machine. [The] Townsend Plan places this power into the hands of the masses. . . . This U.S. could be a paradise instead of the habitation of misery and want if leaders but let go of selfish interests.

Sincerely,

Mrs O. M.

Source: Excerpt from a letter sent to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt by a married woman, January 24, 1936. Ypsilante, Michigan.

Sourcing

1. Who wrote this letter? From where? How might this influence her opinion?

Close Reading

2. What does the author find disappointing in the Social Security program?

Corroborating

3. How do this author’s ideas compare to those expressed by Long and Townsend? Does she see the Social Security Act as consistent with their ideas and plans?