

SECTION II: **FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT AND THE NEW DEAL**

FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

When Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke to a large crowd in front of the Capitol and to millions in front of their radio receivers at home at his inauguration on March 4, 1933, he revealed the essence of his political life—hope for change. Convinced that the only thing worse than the depths of the depression was inaction, the new president—held up on his paralyzed legs with steel braces—promised no deep economic philosophy, and no simple solution, but the commitment to try. That, in fact was the “New Deal,” Roosevelt promised. For a man generally considered one of the greatest presidents since the founding fathers, this does not seem like much. In fact, when he was elected, condescending and derisive judgments of the thirty-second president abounded from the left, the right, and the center. Why then does Roosevelt still capture our imagination and deserve our attention?

The first part of the answer is easy: Roosevelt was in the White House longer than any other president in American history. During his four terms the nation moved from the depths of depression and isolationism through troubling economic times and a devastating world war to economic prosperity and the status of a military superpower with new responsibilities in global leadership. But Roosevelt also enlarged the role of the presidency in significant ways, expanded the domain of the federal government, and launched the modern welfare state in the U.S. Most Americans had expected little, if anything, from Washington prior to the Great Depression. By the end of World War II, however, there were few Americans who had not seen their life change as a result of federal reforms—some historians have even called the New Deal “the Third American Revolution.” Roosevelt also reshaped American politics by mobilizing those on the fringes of public life and creating a political coalition that ensured Democratic Party dominance for more than thirty years. Above all,

his humanity and his deep bond with the American people made him a president like no other and a role model for presidents since. It is for that reason that William E. Leuchtenburg, one of the most eminent historians of the New Deal and Roosevelt, called him “the first modern president.”⁶⁵

THE ELECTION OF 1932

The year 1932 was an important turning point in American history. In international affairs, the Smoot Hawley Tariff had initiated a new era of national



Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt as they are driven to Roosevelt's inauguration in 1932.