

NEW DEAL CHRONOLOGY 1929–1946

From
AMERICAN-MADE
The Enduring Legacy of the WPA
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October 29, 1929: The “Black Tuesday” stock market crash that ushers in the Great Depression.

November 1, 1931: New York State under Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt establishes Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), the first state agency to provide assistance for the unemployed.

January 21, 1932: FDR announces his candidacy for the Democratic nomination.

March 1, 1932: Infant son of famous aviator Charles Lindbergh is kidnapped.

March 7, 1932: Four killed by police in march of unemployed on Ford plant in Dearborn, Michigan.

April 7, 1932: FDR “forgotten man” speech.

May 26, 1932: FDR speech at Oglethorpe University calling for “bold, persistent experimentation.”

June 16, 1932: Herbert Hoover nominated by Republicans as candidate for second term.

July 1, 1932: Democratic National Convention in Chicago nominates FDR as party’s candidate for president.

July 2, 1932: FDR breaks tradition by accepting nomination in person at convention.

July 8, 1932: Dow Jones Industrials hit a low of 41.22, down 89 percent from the pre-depression peak of 381.17.

July 21, 1932: President Herbert Hoover sets aside \$300 million in Reconstruction Finance Corporation funds for loans to states and cities to fight unemployment.

July 28, 1932: “Bonus Army” of world war veterans petitioning for immediate payment of a deferred service bonus is evicted from their camps in Washington by army troops under General Douglas MacArthur.

August 11, 1932: Hoover is officially informed of his renomination as Republican presidential candidate, and accepts.

November 8, 1932: Roosevelt defeats Hoover.

February-March 1933: U.S. unemployment reaches 24.9 percent.

February 14, 1933: Out-of-work bricklayer Giuseppe Zangara tries to shoot FDR in Miami, fatally wounds Chicago mayor Anton Cermak.

March 4, 1933: FDR inaugurated, in inaugural address says, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Declares nationwide bank “holiday” starting Monday, March 6.

March 9, 1933: Start of the “Hundred Days” during which the most significant New Deal legislation is passed and signed into law, starting with the Emergency Banking Act.

March 12, 1933: FDR’s first “fireside chat” on nationwide radio.

March 13, 1933: Banks reopen.

March 31, 1933: FDR signs bill establishing the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

April 7, 1933: Low-alcohol beer and wine on sale as first step toward ending Prohibition.

May 12, 1933: Congress passes Federal Emergency Relief Act, setting

up Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) with \$500 million to aid unemployed.

May 12, 1933: Congress passes the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, allowing farm mortgages to be refinanced.

May 12, 1933: Agricultural Adjustment Act is passed, providing for payments to farmers to limit production.

May 18, 1933: Congress approves the Tennessee Valley Authority to dam rivers and provide electric power to develop the Tennessee Valley.

May 22, 1932: Harry Lloyd Hopkins begins work as federal relief administrator, spends \$5 million in two hours.

June 13, 1933: Congress passes Home Owners' Loan Act, allowing home mortgages to be refinanced.

June 16, 1933: National Industrial Recovery Act is passed, setting up National Recovery Administration (NRA) to supervise "voluntary" industrial employment and production codes and providing \$3.3 billion for dams and bridges and other large-scale projects under the Public Works Administration (PWA).

October 4, 1933: Federal Surplus Relief Corporation chartered; aim is to provide surplus agricultural products to relief families.

November 7, 1933: Fiorello La Guardia elected mayor of New York City.

November 9, 1933: FDR signs executive order creating the Civil Works Administration (CWA) to provide 4 million jobs over the winter of 1933-34. Puts Harry Hopkins in charge.

December 1933: Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution ratified, ending Prohibition.

December 15, 1933: Hopkins has placed 2.6 million workers in CWA jobs.

January 1, 1934: La Guardia sworn in as New York City mayor.

January 15, 1934: 4,264,000 working at CWA jobs.

February 19, 1934: Hopkins on cover of Time magazine.

March 31, 1934: CWA phased out. Some workers keep jobs under FERA, others go back on direct relief.

August 22, 1934: The anti-Roosevelt American Liberty League announces its formation.

October 22, 1934: Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd shot to death by federal agents in Ohio.

November 6, 1934: Midterm elections give Democrats overwhelming majorities in both houses of Congress.

January 4, 1935: FDR calls for a "greatly enlarged" work program in his State of the Union address.

January 11, 1935: Aviatix Amelia Earhart becomes the first solo pilot to fly from Hawaii to California.

April 3, 1935: Aldermanic hearings in New York City produce testimony about "boon doggles."

April 8, 1935: Congress passes and Roosevelt signs the 1935 Emergency Relief Appropriations Act authorizing \$4.8 billion for work relief.

April 28, 1935: FDR announces the work-relief program in a fireside chat.

May 6, 1935: FDR signs executive order creating the work program structure, with the Works Progress Administration under Harry Hopkins its operational arm.

May 27, 1935: Supreme Court declares the National Industrial Recovery Act unconstitutional.

June 5, 1935: Passage of the Wagner Act guarantees the right of collective bargaining.

June 26, 1935: National Youth Administration (NYA) created as a division of the WPA.

July 1935: Ellen Woodward, head of women's work programs under CWA and FERA, placed in charge of WPA's newly combined Division of Women's and Professional Projects. Jacob Baker's Division of Professional and Service Projects is dissolved, though Baker stays on to head federal arts projects.

August 2, 1935: Federal Project Number One, the federal art, music, theater, and writing projects, are announced in Washington. Directors of the projects are Holger Cahill, art; Nicolai Sokoloff, music; Hallie Flanagan, theater; and Henry Alsberg, writing.

August 14, 1935: FDR signs bill creating the Social Security System.

August 15, 1935: Humorist Will Rogers and pilot Wiley Post are killed in an airplane crash near Barrow, Alaska.

September 2, 1935: Hurricane strikes FERA work camp employing world war veterans in the Florida Keys, killing more than 400.

September 8, 1935: Senator Huey Long fatally shot in the Louisiana capitol at Baton Rouge. He dies two days later.

September 19, 1935: FDR sets off by telegraph an explosion opening construction of a canal to carry shipping across Florida. The WPA project is killed by Congress before a year is out.

September 30, 1935: Hoover Dam, formerly Boulder Dam, is dedicated in Nevada.

October 10, 1935: George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess opens on Broadway.

October 17, 1935: WPA Circus debuts in Brooklyn, marking the Federal Theatre Project's first performance in New York.

October 22, 1935: “W-men,” a squad of WPA fraud investigators, announced by WPA administrator Harry Hopkins.

December 14, 1935: Proposal to build a ski lodge on Mount Hood in Oregon with \$250,000 from the WPA is approved in Washington.

January 6, 1936: Supreme Court overturns the Agricultural Adjustment Act, passed in 1933.

January 1936: Workers on the WPA payroll reach 2.8 million.

January 27, 1936: Immediate bonuses to world war veterans approved over Roosevelt’s veto.

March 1936: Spring floods in New England and the Ohio River valley leave 171 dead and 430,000 homeless; 100,000 WPA workers join rescue, recovery, and cleanup efforts.

March 14, 1936: Triple-A Plowed Under, the Federal Theatre Project’s first Living Newspaper production, opens at the Biltmore Theatre in New York.

April 5–6, 1936: Tornadoes strike Tupelo, Mississippi, and Gainesville, Georgia, killing more than 200 in each city and spurring WPA rescue and cleanup work.

April 14, 1936: The “voodoo” Macbeth, a production of the Federal Theatre Project’s Negro Theatre in New York, opens to a sellout crowd in Harlem.

Summer 1936: WPA workers become firefighters as forest fires strike across the upper Midwest.

June 13, 1936: Ground broken on Mount Hood for the Timberline Lodge.

July 11, 1936: The Triborough Bridge, a project of the Public Works Administration, is dedicated by FDR; the bridge links Manhattan with the Bronx and Queens in New York City.

September 14, 1936: Harry Hopkins visits Timberline Lodge construction site.

October 10, 1936: WPA crews begin effort to quench fires burning in coal shafts under New Straitsville, Ohio, for more than fifty years.

October 27, 1936: Federal Theatre Project opens stage version of *It Can't Happen Here*, by Sinclair Lewis, simultaneously in sixteen cities.

November 3, 1936: Roosevelt defeats Republican challenger Alf Landon, the Kansas governor, by more than 10 million votes and 523 electoral votes to 8.

November 28, 1936: Harry Hopkins dedicates stadium addition at Louisiana State University built by the WPA; LSU Tigers beat Tulane.

January 1937: *Idaho: A Guide in Word and Picture* is the first of the state guides in the Federal Writers' Project American Guide series to be published.

January 20, 1937: FDR inaugurated for a second term, says he sees "one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished."

January-February 1937: Some 200,000 WPA workers mustered to fight flooding on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and join the cleanup afterward. Forty WPA workers are among almost 500 dead in the flooding, including 30 who drown when their transportation barge sinks at New Madrid, Missouri.

February 5, 1937: FDR submits his "court-packing" plan to Congress.

February 11, 1937: General Motors recognizes the United Auto Workers as the sole bargaining agent for its workers, ending a sit-down strike that began on December 30.

February 23, 1937: The Federal Theatre Project's *Living Newspaper Power* opens at the Ritz Theatre in New York City.

March 1, 1937: U.S. Steel permits unionization of workers to prevent a strike.

March 29, 1937: Supreme Court upholds a Washington State minimum wage law.

April 12, 1937: Supreme Court upholds the Wagner Act, also known as the National Labor Relations Act.

May 6, 1937: The dirigible Hindenburg explodes at Lakehurst, New Jersey, killing thirty-six.

May 24, 1937: Supreme Court upholds the Social Security Act.

May 27, 1937: Golden Gate Bridge opens in San Francisco. WPA arts workers in New York stage a one-day strike to protest job cuts.

May 30, 1937: Chicago police fire on demonstrators outside Republic Steel, killing ten and wounding many more.

June 16, 1937: The Federal Theatre Project's "runaway opera," *The Cradle Will Rock*, is performed despite WPA efforts to shut it down.

June 22, 1937: Joe Louis knocks out James J. Braddock, the "Cinderella Man," to win the heavyweight title.

July 2, 1937: Amelia Earhart and navigator Fred Noonan take off from Papua New Guinea in their attempt to fly around the world at the equator, and are never heard from again.

July 6, 1937: WPA workers strike to protest wage cuts, longer hours. Strike peters out by the end of the month.

July 7, 1937: Japan invades China.

July 14, 1937: Congress kills Roosevelt's court-packing plan, leaving the president politically weakened.

Summer 1937: WPA rolls decline to around 1.5 million as jobs are cut with signs the economy is beginning to improve.

September 8, 1937: FDR dedicates the Timberline Lodge on Mount Hood

in Oregon. It will open to paying guests in February 1938.

September 9, 1937: Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, at the controls of a steam shovel, breaks ground on New York City's first commercial airport, to be funded by the WPA.

October 5, 1937: FDR, speaking in Chicago, calls for a quarantine of aggressor nations.

October 6, 1937: Harry Hopkins's second wife, Barbara Duncan Hopkins, dies of cancer in a New York hospital.

October 19, 1937: Stock prices plunge, signaling the start of the Roosevelt recession. Four million reemployed workers will lose their jobs again, and unemployment will rise to 19 percent from a depression low of 14 percent earlier in the year.

December 1937: Harry Hopkins has cancer operation at Mayo Clinic. Much of his stomach is removed.

December 22, 1937: First tube of the PWA-funded Lincoln Tunnel linking midtown New York City with New Jersey opens to traffic.

February 16, 1938: Congress passes the Second Agricultural Adjustment Act.

March 14, 1938: Hitler annexes Austria to Germany.

April 21, 1938: WPA rolls back above 2.5 million.

May 26, 1938: Texas congressman Martin Dies named chairman of the House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities (HUAC).

June 22, 1938: Heavyweight champion Joe Louis knocks out Max Schmeling in the first round of their heavyweight rematch at Yankee Stadium.

June 24, 1938: In a fireside chat, Roosevelt launches effort to purge Democratic Party of conservatives.

June 25, 1938: Roosevelt signs the Fair Labor Standards Act, establishing for the first time a forty-hour workweek, a minimum wage, and a ban on factory workers under sixteen.

July 18, 1938: Harry Hopkins makes the cover of Time for the second time.

August 1938: House Un-American Activities Committee begins hearings alleging Communism in the WPA arts projects. They run through the fall.

September 21, 1938: A hurricane hits Long Island and much of New England without warning, taking 680 lives. Flooding follows. The WPA assigns 100,000 workers to flood control and recovery efforts.

October 1, 1938: German troops begin occupation of the Czechoslovakian Sudetenland.

October 30, 1938: War of the Worlds airs on nationwide radio. Many believe H. G. Wells's fictional tale of an attack from Mars is a news report and flee their homes in panic.

November 1938: WPA employment reaches its highest point, with 3,334,594 people on the rolls.

November 1, 1938: Seabiscuit beats Triple Crown winner War Admiral in a match race at Pimlico.

November 8, 1938: Voters rebuff FDR in midterm elections, reelecting conservative Democrats he campaigned against. Republicans add 11 governorships, 81 House seats, and 8 Senate seats.

November 9, 1938: Kristallnacht, "the night of broken glass," signals the beginning of the pogrom against German Jews.

December 23, 1938: Harry Hopkins resigns as WPA administrator and is appointed secretary of commerce by FDR. Francis C. Harrington, an army engineer who has overseen WPA construction projects, is appointed to replace Hopkins.

January 1939: Ellen Woodward, WPA assistant administrator in charge of the Division of Women's and Professional Projects, is named to the Social Security Board. Midwest regional director Florence Kerr succeeds her.

February 18, 1939: Golden Gate International Exposition opens on Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay. The island and its access via the Bay Bridge linking Oakland with San Francisco were projects of the PWA.

March 15, 1939: Germany invades Czechoslovakia.

March 28, 1939: General Francisco Franco's troops take Madrid, ending the Spanish Civil War.

April 30, 1939: The New York World's Fair opens at Flushing Meadow Park in Queens.

June 21, 1939: Congress passes the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1939, making major changes in the WPA and, in a reaction to the HUAC hearings, barring funding for the Federal Theatre Project.

June 30, 1939: Federal Theatre Project gives its last performances.

September 1, 1939: Germany invades Poland, starting World War II.

September 3, 1939: Britain and France declare war on Germany.

November 30, 1939: Soviet Union invades Finland.

December 2, 1939: La Guardia Field in New York City opens to commercial traffic.

January 1, 1940: WPA declares that it has extinguished the longburning underground coal mine fires in New Straitsville, Ohio.

April 9, 1940: Germany invades Denmark.

May 10, 1940: Germany invades Belgium and the Netherlands, leading to the evacuation of British and French troops from Dunkirk starting May 29.

June 5, 1940: German troops enter France.

June 21, 1940: France surrenders to Germany.

July 17, 1940: FDR nominated for a third term at the Democratic convention in Chicago. He will face Republican Wendell L. Willkie.

August 22, 1940: Harry Hopkins resigns as secretary of commerce.

September 16, 1940: Congress passes the Selective Service Act, establishing the country's first peacetime draft.

September 30, 1940: WPA commissioner F. C. Harrington dies in New London, Connecticut. Deputy Commissioner Howard Hunter is appointed to succeed him.

November 5, 1940: FDR elected to an unprecedented third term.

December 29, 1940: FDR says the United States must be the world's "arsenal of democracy." With the resulting arms buildup, WPA workers turn increasingly to training for military production. Meanwhile, WPA construction work focuses on military bases, housing, roads for moving troops and matériel, and airports.

January 6, 1941: FDR in State of the Union address calls for a "world founded upon four essential human freedoms." He includes freedom of speech and worship and freedom from want and fear.

May 27, 1941: FDR declares a state of unlimited national emergency.

June 22, 1941: Germany invades the Soviet Union, violating the mutual non-aggression pact Hitler and Stalin had signed on August 23, 1939.

July 1941: WPA employment drops to around 1 million, the lowest it has been since the agency was created in 1935 and the lowest of any of the New Deal work-relief programs including CWA and FERA.

December 7, 1941: Japanese attack U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor.

December 8, 1941: United States declares war on Japan.

December 11, 1941: Germany and Italy declare war on United States.

January 1942: The last of the American Guide series, Oklahoma: The Sooner State, is published.

January 1942 and beyond: Almost all WPA work is defense-related. Arts workers create civil defense posters, writers craft pamphlets for military personnel, and musicians play at military bases, while construction workers continue to improve the military infrastructure.

March 16, 1942: Howard O. Hunter submits his resignation as WPA commissioner to FDR effective "about May 1."

December 5, 1942: Roosevelt orders abolition of the WPA as no longer needed. Only 354,619 are on the rolls as of November 24.

February 9, 1943: WPA orders that its remaining familiar red, white, and blue project-identifying signs be taken down and processed for scrap metal to aid the war effort.

June 30, 1943: WPA goes out of business and returns \$105 million in unspent funds to the Treasury and \$25 million worth of supplies and materials.

November 7, 1944: FDR elected to a fourth term over Thomas E. Dewey.

April 12, 1945: FDR dies of a cerebral hemorrhage in Warm Springs, Georgia, at age sixty-three.

May 8, 1945: War ends in Europe.

August 14, 1945: War ends in the Pacific.

January 29, 1946: Harry Hopkins dies in a hospital in New York of hemochromatosis. He was fifty-five.