

Herbert Hoover

Herbert Hoover is seen by some as the president responsible for the Great Depression. Who was Herbert Hoover? Did he take any efforts to solve the economic difficulties the nation was facing?

Born in Iowa, in 1874, Herbert Hoover was the son of a blacksmith. He attended Stanford in 1891 and graduated four years later with a degree in Geology. Hoover made his financial fortune as a mining engineer. He made over \$4 million mining for silver, lead, and zinc.



The course of his life changed during World War I, though. As the war began, he orchestrated an evacuation of Americans who were trying to get out of Europe and return home. He and 500 volunteers worked to distribute steamship tickets, clothing, and food to more than 120,000 people. Hoover also undertook a relief effort to provide food for the nation of Belgium, which was suffering after the German invasion.

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson named Hoover as the head of the U.S. Food Administration. In this position, he organized wartime rationing efforts such as “Meatless Mondays” and “Wheatless Wednesdays”. When the war concluded, he shipped massive amounts of food to the starving people of central Europe, even to the defeated nation of Germany. He also sent food to the citizens of Bolshevik-controlled Russia. As the decade came to an end, The New York Times named Herbert Hoover amongst their “Ten Most Important Living Americans”.

Words to watch for:
geology rationing
commerce laissez-faire

After Warren Harding was elected president in 1920, he appointed Hoover to the position of Secretary of Commerce. Hoover turned the office into an important position, encouraging “economic modernization” and overseeing everything from air travel to the census. He also started an “own your own home” campaign, which spurred home construction. He is often regarded as the best Secretary of Commerce in U.S. history.

In 1928 he became the 31st President of the United States. This made him one of only two presidents who had never held a previous elected office or high military rank. He had only been president for eight months when the stock market crashed in 1929, which, of course, led to the Great Depression.

He is often criticized for doing little to try and combat the Great Depression. At that time, the United States had a laissez-faire approach to economic matters. This meant that the government did not interfere with economic matters and just left the economy alone. However, Hoover started several public works projects, such as the Hoover Dam, and raised the highest tax bracket from 25% to 63%. He also established the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which loaned \$238 million to banks and railroad companies. Many of the measures Hoover took were similar to efforts Franklin Roosevelt would later make.

Despite these efforts, by 1932, unemployment was over 24%, more than 5,000 banks had failed, and tens of thousands of Americans were homeless. The shantytowns that they developed became known as Hoovervilles, in honor of the president they saw as responsible for their situation.

While Hoover is still viewed by some as “the president who caused the Great Depression”, his reputation has improved considerably over the years. He was the last president to hold a full cabinet position prior to being elected, and he also laid much of the groundwork for the New Deal programs of the 1930s.

Multiple Choice: *Select the choice that completes the statement or answers the question.*

1. _____ Which of the following best describes how Herbert Hoover became successful?
 - a. Hoover bought and sold on the stock market, making himself a small fortune.
 - b. Hoover patented his invention, the vacuum cleaner, which became a household item.
 - c. Hoover mined for silver, lead, and zinc, making over \$4 million.
 - d. Hoover owned more property than anyone in New York City, making millions from rental fees.

2. _____ Which of the following best summarizes Herbert Hoover's activities during World War I?
 - a. Hoover served in the military, rising to the rank of general. He gained fame for winning several important battles.
 - b. Hoover organized an evacuation of Americans and relief efforts in several European countries.
 - c. Hoover was Assistant Secretary of the Navy throughout the entire war.
 - d. Hoover was not involved in the war effort; he was too occupied running his business.

3. _____ Which of the following events occurred only eight months after Herbert Hoover became president?
 - a. the stock market crash
 - b. the outbreak of World War II
 - c. the use of the first atomic bomb
 - d. the conclusion of World War I

4. _____ Why is Herbert Hoover often criticized?
 - a. Many felt he tried to do too much to combat the Great Depression.
 - b. Many felt he was more concerned with preserving his own fortune than helping people.
 - c. Many felt he was attempting to eliminate the election process so he could remain president.
 - d. Many felt he did too little to try and combat the Great Depression.

5. _____ Which of the following statements is inaccurate?
 - a. Hoover started several public works projects, such as the Hoover Dam.
 - b. Hoover started the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to insure banks.
 - c. Hoover raised the highest tax bracket from 25% to 63%.
 - d. Hoover established the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.



A shack in a Hooverville

Guided Reading: *Fill in the blanks below to create complete sentences.*

1. Herbert Hoover attended _____ in 1891 and graduated four years later with a degree in Geology.
2. Hoover also undertook a relief effort to provide food for the nation of Belgium, which was suffering after the _____ invasion.
3. Hoover organized wartime rationing efforts such as “_____” and “Wheatless Wednesdays”.
4. Hoover shipped massive amounts of food to the starving people of _____, even to the defeated nation of Germany.
5. The _____ named Herbert Hoover amongst their “Ten Most Important Living Americans”.
6. Herbert Hoover is often regarded as the best _____ in U.S. history.
7. Hoover is one of only two presidents who had never held a previous _____ or high military rank.
8. At that time, the United States had a _____ approach to economic matters.
9. The shantytowns that developed during the Great Depression became known as _____.
10. Hoover is still viewed by some as “the president who caused the _____”.

Vocabulary: *Match each word with its correct definition. Consider how the word is used in the lesson. This might help you define each term. Use a dictionary to help if necessary.*

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| a. blacksmith | d. commerce |
| b. geology | e. laissez-faire |
| c. rationing | |
11. _____ distributing fixed amounts of certain items (food, water etc.) during times of shortage
 12. _____ the belief that government should intervene as little as possible in economic matters
 13. _____ the exchange of goods and services
 14. _____ a science that deals with the physical composition of the Earth
 15. _____ a person who makes objects out of iron

Summarize: *Answer the following questions in the space provided. Attempt to respond in a complete sentence for each question. Be sure to use correct capitalization and punctuation!*

1. Who appointed Herbert Hoover as the Secretary of Commerce?
2. What position did Woodrow Wilson appoint Hoover to in 1917?
3. When was Hoover elected president?
4. Where did Hoover send food during, and after, World War I? (Which nations are mentioned?)
5. Why did they call the shantytowns “Hooverilles”?
6. How did the government approach economic matters at the time of the stock market crash?

Student Response: *Write a paragraph addressing the questions raised below. A thorough response should consist of three to five complete sentences.*

7. Herbert Hoover is often thought of as “the president who caused the Great Depression”. Do you feel that this label is fair? Or did he just have the misfortune of being president when it happened? Explain your answer.