

What Did Franklin Delano Roosevelt Do During The "Hundred Days"?

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The "Hundred Days" refers to a pivotal period in American history, spanning from March 9 to June 16, 1933, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) took swift and comprehensive action to combat the devastating effects of the Great Depression. This intense flurry of legislative activity was unprecedented, marking a new era of active government intervention aimed at economic recovery and social reform. Roosevelt's leadership during this critical phase not only laid the foundation for numerous New Deal programs but also reshaped the role of the federal government in Americans' lives. Understanding what Roosevelt accomplished during this period offers insight into his approach to governance and his commitment to restoring hope and stability to a battered nation.

Context Leading Up to the Hundred Days

Before delving into Roosevelt's actions, it's essential to understand the context of the time. The United States was suffering from a severe economic downturn, with widespread unemployment, bank failures, and collapsing industries. The stock market crash of 1929 had plunged the nation into the Great Depression, eroding public confidence and causing immense hardship. President Herbert Hoover's policies had been largely seen as insufficient, and there was a pressing demand for bold leadership. Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was inaugurated on March 4, 1933, with a promise of "a new deal for the American people," quickly moved to address these crises.

Roosevelt's Immediate Actions During the Hundred Days

Upon taking office, Roosevelt recognized the urgency of stabilizing the economy and restoring public trust. The first days of his presidency were marked by intense activity to address the banking crisis, unemployment, and economic depression.

Banking Crisis and the Emergency Banking Act

One of Roosevelt's first priorities was to restore confidence in the banking system. The nation was experiencing widespread bank failures, with depositors losing their savings. To stem the panic, Roosevelt declared a "bank holiday" from March 6 to March 10, temporarily closing all banks to prevent further withdrawals and allow for inspections.

- Emergency Banking Act (March 9, 1933):

This legislation authorized the federal government to examine and support banks before they reopened. It aimed to restore trust by ensuring only financially sound banks would operate. The act was passed swiftly, and by March 13, many banks reopened, stabilizing the financial system.

The Fireside Chats and Public Confidence

Roosevelt utilized radio broadcasts, known as fireside chats, to communicate directly with Americans, explaining his policies and reassuring the public. His calming messages helped restore confidence and encouraged depositors to trust the banking system again.

Legislative Milestones of the Hundred Days

The cornerstone of Roosevelt's efforts was the rapid passage of a wide array of legislation aimed at economic stabilization, relief, and reform.

The New Deal Programs and Legislation

During this period, Congress passed an unprecedented number of laws—more than 15 major bills—aimed at addressing different facets of the crisis.

- **The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA):**
Designed to boost agricultural prices by reducing surpluses, the AAA paid farmers to leave land unplanted, thereby decreasing production and raising crop prices.
- **The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA):**
Established the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which set industry-wide codes to promote fair competition, stabilize prices, and improve working conditions.
- **The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC):**
Created to provide jobs for young men in conservation projects, such as planting trees, building parks, and preventing soil erosion.
- **The Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA):**
Provided direct aid to states for relief programs, helping unemployed and impoverished Americans.
- **The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA):**
Aimed at regional development, it built dams and hydroelectric plants to provide flood control, electricity, and economic development in the Tennessee Valley.
- **The Economy Act:**
Implemented budget cuts to reduce federal expenditures and restore fiscal stability.

These initiatives represented a swift, comprehensive response to the economic disaster, focusing on immediate relief, recovery, and reform.

Expanding the Scope of Federal Power

Roosevelt's legislative agenda during the Hundred Days marked a significant expansion of federal authority. This shift was evident in the creation of agencies and programs that directly intervened in

the economy and society. The federal government took on roles previously considered outside its traditional scope, such as regulating industry standards, managing natural resources, and providing direct relief.

Key Challenges and Opposition

Despite the rapid legislative achievements, Roosevelt faced considerable opposition from conservatives, business leaders, and some members of Congress who feared government overreach. Critics argued that the New Deal programs threatened free enterprise and individual freedoms. There was also concern over the increasing power of federal agencies and the constitutionality of some measures.

Nevertheless, Roosevelt effectively communicated the necessity of his policies and gained public support, which helped him push through his legislative agenda during this critical period.

Impact and Legacy of the Hundred Days

The Hundred Days set a precedent for swift government action in times of crisis. Roosevelt's bold legislative push helped stabilize the banking system, provided direct relief to millions, and introduced reforms that reshaped American economic policy.

Long-Term Effects

- Institutional Changes:

The creation of agencies like the SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission) and the FDIC (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) established new regulatory frameworks still in place today.

- Economic Recovery:

While the Depression persisted beyond 1933, Roosevelt's policies laid the groundwork for recovery and reform that would continue throughout his presidency.

- Political Transformation:

The success of the Hundred Days boosted Roosevelt's popularity and cemented the role of the federal government as an active agent in economic and social welfare.

Conclusion

What did Franklin Delano Roosevelt do during the "Hundred Days"? He orchestrated an extraordinary surge of legislative activity that fundamentally transformed American government and society. Through swift and decisive actions—ranging from stabilizing banks and providing relief to establishing regulatory agencies—Roosevelt demonstrated leadership and innovation in a time of unprecedented crisis. His efforts during this period not only helped mitigate the worst effects of the Great Depression but also reshaped the relationship between the federal government and the American people, leaving a legacy of intervention, reform, and hope that defines his presidency and American policy to this day.

Frequently Asked Questions

What was the main goal of Franklin D. Roosevelt during the Hundred Days?

Roosevelt aimed to rapidly address the economic crisis of the Great Depression by implementing sweeping reforms and new policies to stabilize the economy and provide relief to suffering Americans.

Which major legislation was passed during Franklin D. Roosevelt's Hundred Days?

During the Hundred Days, Roosevelt and Congress passed key legislation including the Emergency Banking Act, the Federal Emergency Relief Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and the National Industrial Recovery Act, among others.

How did Roosevelt's actions during the Hundred Days impact the U.S. economy?

His swift legislative actions helped restore confidence in the financial system, stabilized banks, provided relief to the unemployed, and set the foundation for economic recovery during the Great Depression.

What role did the New Deal play during the Hundred Days?

The New Deal was a series of programs and reforms launched during the Hundred Days to provide relief, recovery, and reform, fundamentally reshaping American economic and social policy.

Why is the Hundred Days considered a defining period in Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency?

It marked the rapid and decisive start of Roosevelt's presidency, showcasing his proactive leadership and setting the tone for the New Deal policies that would define his administration.

How did the public and Congress react to Roosevelt's initiatives during the Hundred Days?

The public largely supported Roosevelt's aggressive approach to solving the economic crisis, and Congress responded with swift approval, enabling the quick passage of crucial legislation to combat the Depression.

Additional Resources

What Did Franklin Delano Roosevelt Do During The "Hundred Days"?

The phrase "Hundred Days" resonates profoundly in American history, symbolizing a period of

extraordinary legislative activity and decisive action under the leadership of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Beginning March 9, 1933, just days after his inauguration, this intense flurry of activity lasted until June 16, 1933, and was characterized by an unprecedented legislative push aimed at addressing the catastrophic economic collapse of the Great Depression. Roosevelt's actions during this period fundamentally reshaped the federal government's role in economic and social life, setting the tone for his entire presidency. To fully understand what Roosevelt did during the Hundred Days, one must delve into the specific policies, legislative initiatives, and executive actions that defined this pivotal era.

Context and Significance of the Hundred Days

The Hundred Days was not just a legislative blitz but a reflection of Roosevelt's urgent response to the national crisis. When Roosevelt took office in March 1933, the United States was in the depths of economic despair: banks had failed en masse, unemployment was soaring, and millions faced starvation and homelessness. The federal government's traditional limited role was inadequate to address such widespread suffering.

Roosevelt's approach was both pragmatic and innovative. Recognizing the need for swift action, he called Congress into special session, setting the stage for a series of aggressive reforms. The significance of this period lies not only in the number of laws passed but also in their scope and ambition—establishing the foundation for the New Deal and shifting the trajectory of American governance.

Initial Steps and Immediate Actions

The first days of Roosevelt's presidency were marked by a sense of urgency. He immediately declared a nationwide bank holiday to prevent further bank runs and restore public confidence. This initial step was crucial in stabilizing the financial system and buying time to craft more comprehensive reforms.

Within hours of his inauguration, Roosevelt issued a series of executive orders aimed at stabilizing the banking system. These included:

- Bank Holiday (March 6-13, 1933): Closed all banks for four days, during which the government inspected the health of financial institutions.
- Emergency Banking Act (March 9, 1933): Passed by Congress on the first day of the special session, this law provided federal assistance to stabilize banks and restore public trust.

These measures set the tone for the rest of the Hundred Days, emphasizing swift, executive-led action combined with legislative support.

Major Legislative Initiatives of the Hundred Days

During this period, Roosevelt and Congress enacted an astonishing array of laws—15 major pieces of legislation—to combat the economic crisis. These laws fundamentally transformed the American economy and society.

The Banking and Financial Reforms

- Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Act (June 16, 1933): Established to insure bank deposits, reducing the risk of bank runs and promoting stability.
- Glass-Steagall Act: Separated commercial banking from investment banking to curtail risky financial practices.
- Securities Act of 1933: Regulated the stock market and mandated transparency from securities issuers.

Agricultural and Industrial Recovery

- Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA, May 1933): Paid farmers to reduce crop production, aiming to raise agricultural prices and restore farm incomes.
- National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA, June 1933): Promoted industrial growth by establishing codes of fair competition, setting wages and prices, and encouraging cooperation among industries.

Labor and Social Legislation

- National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act, July 1935, but initiated during the Hundred Days): Recognized workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively.
- Fair Labor Standards Act (1938, initiated during the New Deal's later phases but rooted in early efforts): Established minimum wages and maximum hours.

Public Works and Relief Programs

- Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC, March 1933): Provided employment for young men in conservation projects.
- Public Works Administration (PWA, June 1933): Funded large-scale infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, and dams.
- Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA, May 1933): Developed resources in the Tennessee River Valley, providing flood control, electricity, and economic development.

Key Policies and Their Impact

Roosevelt's Hundred Days was characterized by policies that aimed to restore confidence, stimulate economic activity, and provide relief to millions suffering from the depression.

The "Banking Holiday" and Financial Stabilization

The immediate closure of banks and subsequent inspections prevented further bank failures. The FDIC's creation reassured depositors, fostering a return of savings and renewed trust in the banking system. This was arguably the most immediate and visible success of Roosevelt's first days in office.

The Rise of the New Deal

The legislative acts passed during this period laid the groundwork for the New Deal—a series of programs, public work projects, financial reforms, and regulations designed to recover and reform the economy.

- The AAA helped stabilize agricultural prices, although it faced later legal challenges.
- The NIRA attempted to stabilize industry but was declared unconstitutional in 1935, prompting new approaches.
- The PWA and CCC created millions of jobs, providing immediate relief and infrastructure.

Expansion of Federal Power and Regulation

Roosevelt's actions during the Hundred Days signaled a departure from laissez-faire policies. The federal government took on a more active role in economic planning, regulation, and social welfare, setting precedents that would shape American policy for decades.

Challenges and Criticisms

While Roosevelt's Hundred Days was groundbreaking, it was not without controversy:

- Constitutional Concerns: Some critics argued that the rapid legislative pace undermined constitutional checks and balances.
- Unintended Consequences: Programs like the AAA faced legal challenges; the Supreme Court later declared parts of the NIRA unconstitutional.
- Political Opposition: Conservatives and business interests often opposed Roosevelt's expansion of federal authority.

Despite these challenges, Roosevelt's leadership during this period is widely regarded as

transformative for American governance.

Legacy of the Hundred Days

The Hundred Days set a precedent for presidential leadership and extraordinary legislative activity. It established the expectation that the federal government could and should intervene decisively in times of national crisis.

The laws enacted during this period:

- Reshaped the financial system, creating stability and consumer protections.
- Launched social welfare programs aimed at economic recovery.
- Expanded federal authority over the economy and society.

Roosevelt's success during this period also helped restore public confidence in government and paved the way for subsequent New Deal programs.

Conclusion: What Did Franklin Delano Roosevelt Do During The "Hundred Days"?

During the Hundred Days, Franklin Delano Roosevelt transformed the United States' approach to its economic crisis through an aggressive, comprehensive legislative agenda. He led the nation in closing banks, enacting financial reforms, promoting industrial and agricultural recovery, and launching relief programs that provided immediate employment and long-term infrastructure benefits.

Roosevelt's swift and expansive actions during this period redefined the role of the federal government, establishing a new paradigm of active intervention in the economy. His leadership not only stemmed the immediate tide of depression but also laid the foundation for a new era of American governance—one characterized by government responsibility for economic stability, social welfare, and the well-being of its citizens.

In essence, the Hundred Days was the crucible in which Roosevelt's vision for a more engaged, responsive federal government was forged—a vision that would influence the trajectory of the United States for generations to come.

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