

The Great Depression and African Americans

The problems of the Great Depression affected virtually every group of Americans. No group was harder hit than African Americans, however. By 1932, approximately half of black Americans were out of work. In some Northern cities, whites called for blacks to be fired from any jobs as long as there were whites out of work. Racial violence again became more common, especially in the South. Lynchings, which had declined to eight in 1932, surged to 28 in 1933.

Although most African Americans traditionally voted Republican, the election of President Franklin Roosevelt began to change voting patterns. Roosevelt entertained African-American visitors at the White House and was known to have a number of black advisors. According to historian John Hope Franklin, many African Americans were excited by the energy with which Roosevelt began tackling the problems of the Depression and gained "a sense of belonging they had never experienced before" from his fireside chats.

Still, discrimination occurred in New Deal housing and employment projects, and President Roosevelt, for political reasons, did not back all of the legislation favored by such groups as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). When the U.S. entered World War II, labor leader A. Philip Randolph threatened to organize a march on Washington to protest job discrimination in the military and other defense-related activities. In response, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, stating that all persons, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, would be allowed to participate fully in the defense of the United States.

To find additional sources on race relations in the 1930s and 1940s, search [American Memory](#) using such terms as *prejudice*, *discrimination*, *segregation*, *Afro-Americans*, and *race relations*.

Source and to Learn More: Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/depwwii/race/>