1928

Herbert Hoover vs Al Smith

A 20-minute lesson on the 1928 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Roaring Twenties	ELECTORAL VOTES 531 total
WINNER Herbert Hoover (Republican) · 444 EV	RUNNER-UP Al Smith (Democratic) · 87 EV
KEY ISSUE Prosperity; Prohibition; religious prejudice against the first Catholic major-party nominee	TURNOUT 56.9%

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1928

After Coolidge said "I do not choose to run" in 1927, Republicans needed new candidate for 1928. Picked Herbert Hoover - Coolidge's Secretary of Commerce.

Hoover famous worldwide. During WWI organized food relief for starving Belgium/Europe. Saved millions of lives. After war organized food relief for Russia/Europe. Time magazine called him "Great Humanitarian." Never held elected office. Stanford-educated engineer, made millions mining around world.

Democrats picked Governor Al Smith of New York. Smith was Irish Catholic - FIRST Catholic ever from major party. From Lower East Side NYC. Strong NY accent. Liked brown derby hat. Supported ending Prohibition (alcohol ban).

Look at picture. That Herbert Hoover - faced Great Depression soon.

1928 campaign bitter. Many Protestants believed Catholic president would take orders from Pope. Anti-Catholic literature flooded country. KKK (3-5M members 1920s) actively campaigned against Smith.

Smith wet stance angered dry Protestant South. South voted De-



Herbert Hoover, 31st U.S. president. "Great Humanitarian" who saved millions during WWI but blamed for Great Depression that began 7 months into presidency.

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Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became 31st U.S. president after 1928 election?

2.

What was historically significant about Al Smith's 1928 candidacy?

3.

What happened seven months after Hoover's inauguration?

Warm-up (5 min)

In 1928 Democrats picked Catholic governor Al Smith. First Catholic ever to run for president from major party. Many Americans had never voted Catholic before. Election bitter.

Answer key

1.

Herbert Hoover. Won 444 EV vs Smith's 87. Popular vote 58.2% vs 40.8% - biggest landslide. Hoover was Coolidge's Secretary of Commerce (1921-28), world-famous as "Great Humanitarian" for WWI food relief in Belgium/Europe.

AP students should know 444-87 Hoover landslide.

2.

Al Smith was first Catholic ever nominated for president by major political party in U.S. history. Irish Catholic from Lower East Side NYC. Catholic faith major factor in 1928 loss. Anti-Catholic prejudice widespread 1920s. Many Protestants believed Catholic president would take orders from Pope. Anti-Catholic literature flooded country during campaign. KKK (3-5M members 1920s) actively campaigned against Smith. 1928 anti-Catholic prejudice not overcome until JFK's 1960 victory - first Catholic actually elected, 32 years after Smith's nomination.

AP students should articulate religious significance.

3.

Seven months after Hoover's March 4, 1929 inauguration, stock market crashed October 1929. October 24-29, 1929 crash wiped out ~$30B in stock value. Crash began Great Depression - worst economic catastrophe in U.S. history. By 1933 unemployment 25%, industrial production -46%, ~9,000 banks failed. Hoover blamed for Depression even though structurally caused by 1920s economic weaknesses (speculative stock expansion, unsustainable consumer debt, agricultural distress, weak banking regulation). Hoover response inadequate: believed in voluntary cooperation and limited federal intervention. 1932 election produced FDR's 472-59 EV landslide and New Deal era.

AP students should know Depression context.