

# Letters to the Roosevelts during the Depression, 1935-36

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*As the human consequences of the prolonged depression unfolded, people grew desperate. Many of them looked to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt for help. Indeed, the Roosevelts received over 15 million letters from struggling Americans. Two such letters are excerpted below.*

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From *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* by Robert S. McElvaine. Copyright © 1983 by the University of North Carolina Press.

Goff, Kansas

May 10, 1935

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt:

My Dear Friend:

For the first time of my lifetime I am asking a favor and this one I am needing very badly and I am coming to you for help.

Among your friends do you know of one who is discarding a spring coat for a new one. If so could you beg the old one for me. I wear a size 40 to 42 I have not had a spring coat for six years and last Sunday when getting ready to go to church I see my winter coat had several very thin places in the back that is very noticeable My clothes are very plain so I could wear only something plain. we were hit very hard by the drought and every penny we can save goes for feed to put in crop.

Hoping for a favorable reply.

Your friend Mrs. J. T.

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Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt

Wash. D.C.

February 1936

Dear Mr. President,

I am a boy of 12 years. I want to tell you about my family. My father hasn't worked for 5 months. He went plenty times to relief, he filed out application. They won't give us anything. I don't know why. Please you do something. We haven't paid 4 months rent, Everyday the landlord rings the bell, we don't open the door for him. We are afraid that will be put out, been put out before, and don't want to happen again. We haven't paid the gas bill, and the electric bill, haven't paid grocery bill for 3 months. My bother goes to Lane Tech. High School. He's eighteen years old, hasn't gone to school for 2 weeks because he got no carfare. I have a sister she's twenty years, she can't find work. My father he staying home. All the time he's crying because he can't find work. I told him why are you crying daddy, and

daddy said why shouldn't I cry when there is nothing in the house. I feel sorry for him. That night I couldn't sleep. The next morning I wrote this letter to you. in my room. Were American citizens and were born in Chicago, Ill. and I don't know why they don't help us Please answer right away because we need it. Will starve. Thank you.

God bless you.

[Anonymous]

Chicago, Ill.

## **REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. In the first letter what was the source of the writer's economic difficulties?
2. How did the economic circumstance of the second writer differ from the first?
3. What did the letters imply about attitudes toward the office of the presidency? Toward the Roosevelts?