

Debating Context

Directions: Read the background and passage carefully and think about the **historical context** in which the text was written.

- Debate how knowing this context changes or deepens the meaning of the passage. You may take either side of the debate, but you must justify your position.
- Use evidence from the text and background to support your argument.



Background

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, unemployment in the United States soared, families lost homes, and many Americans felt hopeless. In 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered his first inaugural address as the new president. His goal was to restore public confidence and inspire collective action.

Roosevelt's Call to Courage

"This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. In every dark hour of our national life, a leadership of frankness and vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory. And I am convinced that you will again give that support to leadership in these critical days."

Debate Question: How does understanding the context of the Great Depression change the meaning of Roosevelt's words?

- Side 1: *Context makes all the difference.* Without knowing about the Great Depression, the words lose their urgency and power.
- Side 2: *Context is helpful but not necessary.* The words stand on their own as universally inspiring, regardless of the time period.



Reflection: Could this speech inspire people in modern times facing a different crisis? Why or why not?