STATE AND ECONOMY IN THE 1930S
Herbert Hoover, President when the Great Depression struck in 1929, struggled to respond. This cartoon, sympathetic to Hoover, has him doing his best to “quiet” the crises while the donkey (representing the Democratic party) makes irresponsible promises.
The Roosevelt Administration’s “New Deal” experimented broadly with new federal programs, but was running into its own problems by the mid-1930s—largely because the depression persisted despite New Deal experimentation. Here, the entire program is “on the rocks” and many of its ambitious programs are being thrown overboard.
As the New Deal faltered in the late 1930s, it also faced obstacles and opposition within its own party. The Democratic Party of the 1930s was a curious combination of Northern urban liberal and labor interests, and old guard Southern segregationists. For the South, the expansion of federal power had particularly dire implications, as new federal programs were (at least potentially) accompanied by equal services and equal protection for Southern blacks.
Among the many criticisms of the New Deal was the charge that the Administration had overreached its power, violating both constitutional limits and time-worn American attachment to limited government. Such anxieties would re-appear in the war years, encouraging wartime agencies to carefully distinguish their programs from those of their totalitarian enemies.