

The year was...

1937

If ever a period of twentieth century American history was beset by uncertainty, that period was the late 1930s. The world was not at war, but nearly everyone knew it soon would be. The worst of the Depression was over, but people were all too mindful of the hard times through which many still struggled and the distinct possibility that they might return. A growing sense of optimism fed by the apparent economic recovery alternated almost feverishly with a lack of confidence in its strength and permanence. It's no wonder much of the data in the Roper Center archive for 1937 conveys an air of ambiva-

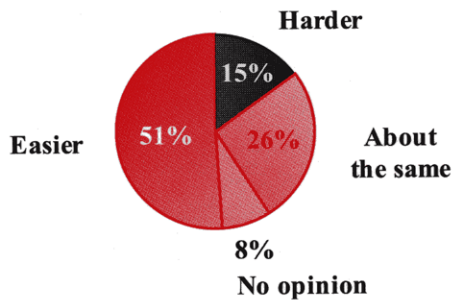
lence, punctuated occasionally by a feeling of impending doom.

Still, there was room for both hope and enjoyment. Among the bright spots were those that flickered on movie screens or appeared on baseball fields or in the comic pages of the newspapers. In the public's preference for "Little Orphan Annie," *Fortune* magazine pollsters saw reason to believe, even in those dark times, in the continued resilience of the American spirit.

—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee

Food Around the Corner

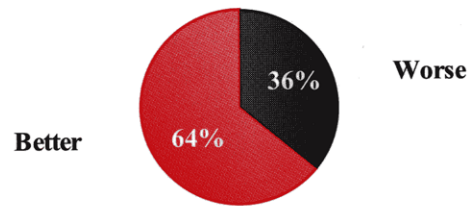
Question: Do you think it is easier or harder to find work in your community now, than it was a year ago?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, September 9-13, 1937.

Looking Better, In General

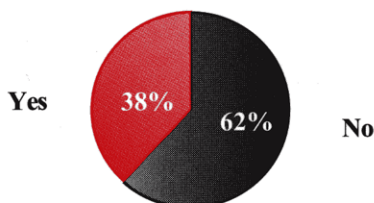
Question: Do you expect general business conditions to be better or worse in the next six months?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, October 20-25, 1937.

Recovery Still to Hit Home

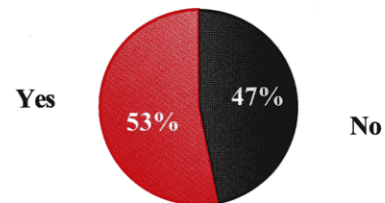
Question: Considering your income and your cost of living, do you feel you are better off today than a year ago?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, October 6-11, 1937.

Optimism Remains Guarded

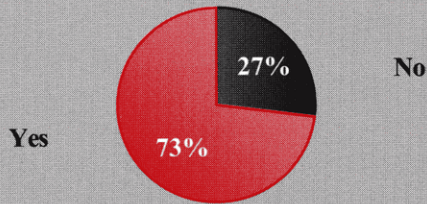
Question: Do you think Congress and the President should seek to enact a second NRA (National Recovery Act)?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, February 17-22, 1937.

Storm Clouds On the Horizon

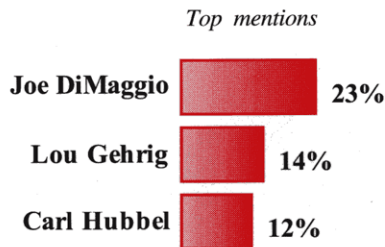
Question: Do you think there will be another world war?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, July 25-30, 1937.

Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?

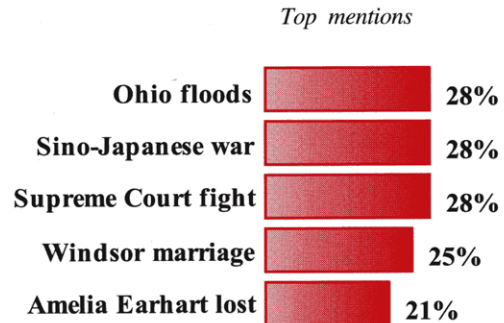
Question: In your opinion, who was the most valuable player in the Big Leagues this year?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, October 6-11, 1937.

Lost Flyer and Lost Throne

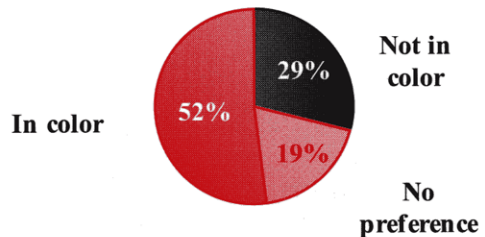
Question: Which events interested you most in 1937?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, December 1-6, 1937.

Dang Newfangled Technology

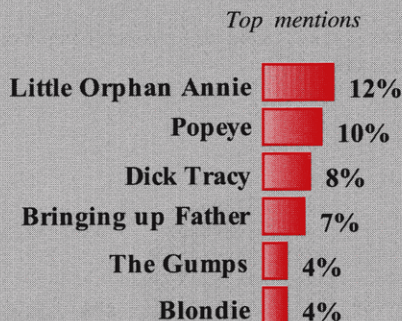
Question: If a movie in color was at one theater, and the same movie not in color was at another theater, which would you be more likely to go to?



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, August 11-16, 1937.

The Sun'll Come Out Tomorrow

Question: Do you have a favorite comic strip? Which one?



"Little Orphan Annie. Let the historian of our times not be misled by Shirley Temple's box-office gross into the belief that 'America's Sweetheart' was the most important juvenile of her period. Homely, dowdy, priggish Little Orphan Annie probably rules a greater public by her inner grace. Her roles are far more subtle. Outwardly she is an unexceptional creature of saccharine sentimentality, with a dash of Cinderella, Pollyanna,

Little Eva, and Florence Nightingale. That would be enough to make her the darling of enough simple souls to pay her way. But the world she lives in fulfills another need. It is the world of American opportunity, in which the poor and the meek may rise to affluence through their own efforts; in which the virtuous rich and the powerful may be cast down—but not for long—by the connivance of unconscionable wretches who will stop at nothing. That is why she is, according to analysis of the Survey returns, the favorite not only of the nation as a whole, of housewives, and farmers, and oldsters, but also of salaried executives, the prosperous, and the upper middle class—and has been condemned as fascist by the Left-wing press. The orphan is not only the symbol of sweetness and light and the homely virtues, but she provides an escape for the social conscience. When prolonged misfortune befalls her, it is not merely a matter of bathos, it is a menace to the American scheme of things. For example, when she lost her dog Sandy in 1933, matters became so grave that Henry Ford felt impelled to wire her creator as follows: 'PLEASE DO ALL YOU CAN TO HELP ANNIE FIND SANDY STOP WE ARE ALL INTERESTED HENRY FORD.' This was no prank—the wire was authenticated. And of course Sandy was found."

Source: Survey and commentary by the Roper Organization for *Fortune* magazine, January 1937.