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The New Deal Was a Failure

Not all Americans supported President Roosevelt or embraced New Deal programs and policies. In the excerpt that follows, from [American Life Histories, 1936-1940](#), Dr. Santos, a Cuban-born optometrist, talks about the New Deal and his feelings about President Roosevelt. Why does Dr. Santos believe that the New Deal has been a failure? What plans does he have for making the United States a better place to live? How does he feel about President Roosevelt? Why does he feel the way he does?

View the [entire interview](#) with Dr. Santos. Use your browser's Back Button to return to this point.

As to the New Deal, I believe that it has been a failure as it has protected the trusts more than the American people. Today, the poor are poorer, and the trusts are richer. Another reason: this is a county that is controlled by the trusts. When one stands on the street, and closes his eyes for a moment, and then opens them and looks; everything, absolutely all that one sees is made by the trusts. The automobile that passes by, the street car, the trucks, everything that one wears: shoes, clothes, etc. When one enters a restaurant, he sees the plates, the tables, the spoons, all is made by the trusts. 95% of what one eats is controlled by the trusts. The trusts for more than 200 years have been controlling all the industries, and killing the small business men. We have reached a state in which the trusts dominate all, as they are the owners of the money, or nearly all the money that there is in the United States.

The war can already be seen between one trust and others; the strongest will dominate the weaker trusts, and the capital will be reduced to a few men who will control everything.

In my particular opinion, all is not lost. A few men are necessary, who would have sufficient energy and intelligence to make social laws; ^[+] for example, all machines which displace ten men, should give the salary to those ten men. For example, one machine can, manipulated by the number of individuals which it displaces, taking turns by hour. The Capitalist will have the right to a certain equitable percentage, and there cannot be a capitalist who can have as capital more than one million dollars. All that passes this amount the Federal government will confiscate it for the betterment of the community.

The utility companies should be the property of the communities. All poor men who passes 50 years should be pensioned of he government, with a modest pension, but at the same time sufficient for the necessities of each one.

The system of voting in this county should be reformed, as the system that exists nowadays is very antiquated as it is frustrated in nearly all the country. One of the principal things that should be done is the [earnet?] (identification card) with the picture and finger prints to avoid fraud. . . .

We must take into consideration that the American people have more progress and civilization than the rest of the world, who know their rights; who are accustomed to eat and dress, and that today they do not eat nor dress. The American people know that in the United States there is a surplus of food; there is a surplus of clothing; and there is a surplus of everything, while he (?) all.

Days before the NRA, lard was at .07 per pound, today May 1935, lard is at 21. and thus successively all the article, an enormity; but nevertheless, the workers earn less today than before the NRA -- those who work -- and those who do not work, have multiplied to such an extent that if I should say that 25,000,000 workers are without work at the present moment, I would not be mistaken. . . .

I do not believe that Roosevelt will solve this crisis, for if he had wanted to, as he promised to the American people, he would have solved it, as the Legislature and the Senate have given Roosevelt more power than any other president of the United States. . . .

I must state in making these declarations that I was one of so many fools that believing in the so much "cackled" ([casarado?]) New Deal, and that I went to deposit my vote for the one who is today President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who has "[desepcionado?]" (deceived) my most pure illusions with the respect to the solution of this great crisis which effects "en le mas profundo," (4) (in the most profound) the people of the United States. . . .

I wish to state also that I will not vote again for any candidate for President of the United States, who belongs to the Democratic or Republican party, as I believe that anyone of these presidents has not an ideology really democratic and just, for those of us who work, and produce, and are respectful of the law.

[top of page](#)

View the [entire interview](#) with Dr. Santos from [American Life Histories, 1936-1940](#). Use your browser's Back Button to return to this point.

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VIEWPOINT 1

"There were ten million people unemployed all the time during the New Deal. That history has not been brought out clearly. Most of your historians of that period were New Dealers on the [government] payroll. . . . Everything pro-New Deal was written and almost nothing against it."

The New Deal Achieved Little

More than sixty years have passed since Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration imposed its New Deal agenda on the American people. In these decades the United States rose from the depths of the Great Depression, won World War II, and became the world's economic leader, as well as its great military superpower. Virtually none of this enormous success story can be attributed to the New Deal. In fact, by the eve of World War II in 1939, with the New Deal programs having been in place for over six years, the country was, overall, in little better shape than when Roosevelt first took office in 1933; and it was the nation's eventual entry into the European conflict, creating a gigantic surge of war production, that stimulated the economy and ended the Depression. "When the reform energies of the New Deal began to wane around 1939," says popular historian Howard Zinn,

the nation was back to its normal state: a permanent army of unemployed; twenty or thirty million poverty-ridden people effectively blocked from

public view by a huge, prosperous, and fervently consuming middle class. . . . What the New Deal did was to refurbish middle-class America, which had taken a dizzying fall in the Depression, to restore jobs to half the jobless, and to give just enough to the lowest classes . . . to create an aura of good will.¹

“Roosevelt didn’t follow any particular policy after 1936,” adds Raymond Moley, originally one of the president’s closest advisors and later one of his staunchest critics.

Our economy began to slide downhill—our unemployment increased—after that, until 1940. This is something that liberals are not willing to recognize. It was the war that saved the economy and saved Roosevelt. . . . I think if it weren’t for the war, Roosevelt probably would have been defeated in 1940.²

The early impression that it had been the New Deal, and not the war, that had saved the country came partly from the fact that the New Deal’s failures and shortcomings were not often truthfully documented during the 1930s and early 1940s. “There were ten million people unemployed all the time during the New Deal,” states Hamilton Fish, a Republican congressman and leading Roosevelt opponent during the Depression and war years.

That history has not been brought out clearly. Most of your historians of that period were New Dealers on the [government] payroll. He [Roosevelt] had a hundred million dollars to spend without making an account. He gave large sums of money to his friends, who were authors and writers. Everything pro-New Deal was written and almost nothing against it.³

Raymond Moley was one of those who managed to get his voice heard above the roar of the New Deal lackeys and apologists, although by the time people began to listen to him, it

was too late; much in the way of time and resources had already been wasted. Shortly before the United States entered the war, he assessed the New Deal, saying that it had made a few minor gains. "But it is difficult to reconcile them with what they have cost," he wrote.

It is not alone that . . . investment remains dormant, enterprise is chilled, the farmers' problem has not yet been solved, unemployment is colossal. It is that thousands of devoted men and women, who felt, as sincerely as Roosevelt, that we must redefine the aims of democratic government in terms of modern needs, have been alienated. . . . Their enthusiasm and their energies have been lost. . . . Extravagant promises have raised expectations far beyond any reasonable hope of realization.⁴

Popular journalist and social commentator H.L. Mencken was another boisterous critic of the New Deal in its heyday. He had the gall and courage to label Roosevelt a "quack doctor" who had "carried on his job with an ingratiating grin upon his face, like that of a snake-oil vendor at a village carnival," and who had shown no more sense of honor and morals than such a character. Harold Ickes, Frances Perkins, and the other leading New Dealers were "impudent nobodies," Mencken maintained, and their reign a "dreadful burlesque of civilized government."⁵

Mencken was thoroughly disillusioned with Roosevelt's policies, but he made the mistake of thinking that most of the American people agreed and that the Democrats would go down to defeat in 1936. They did not, of course; and it is reasonable to ask why the president and his cronies were so consistently successful at convincing the masses that the New Deal was in fact a *good* deal. The answer comes from noted French journalist Amaury de Riencourt, who from his foreign vantage offers a cool and unbiased observation of American politics and behavior:

What Roosevelt had to a supreme degree, was a charismatic charm that poured out naturally, the irresistible charm of a born leader of men. As soon as he was in office he communicated with the American people through his "fireside chats," a remarkable exercise in mass hypnotism. . . . A new device, the radio, had prevailed over the older printed word; and when his magnetic voice purred its way into the ears of millions of his compatriots, he managed to cast an unbreakable spell on America. . . . At this game, Franklin Roosevelt was unrivaled.⁶

Whatever the reasons for Roosevelt's popularity and success at keeping himself in power, Moley, Mencken, and other administration critics were vindicated later when, looking back from the convenient perspective of later decades, it

President Roosevelt speaks to the American public during one of his famous "fireside chats." Critics argue that the president lulled the nation into a false sense of security through his reassuring addresses.



became clear that the New Dealers had led the nation down the proverbial garden path. While listening to the president's reassurances on the radio, most Americans were blissfully unaware of the amount of power he had gradually amassed. This power was not only centralized in his staff and in the agencies he created, but especially, and ominously, in his own person; no American president before him, with the possible exception of Lincoln in the Civil War emergency, had ever wielded so much unbridled personal authority over the Congress, business and social institutions, and the lives of everyday people. In a very real sense, Roosevelt induced the American people, unknowingly of course, to trade many of their freedoms for a feeling of security, unfortunately one that turned out to be false. As de Riencourt puts it,

Throughout the first year of his rule, Roosevelt concentrated on increasing the amount of power in his hands, overriding the reluctance of a disgruntled Congress. Administrative agencies assumed a degree of power and independence that left the legislative branch with very little influence on the dizzying course of events. . . . The spirit of the Roman *panem et circenses* [bread and circuses, that is, controlling the masses by appeasing them with free handouts] was slowly pervading the atmosphere, without destroying the willingness to work but weakening the former self-reliance of pioneering days. The mainstay of American freedom—freedom *from* authority—began to give way now that a large majority of the people were willing to barter freedom for security. . . . Under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, America took a decisive step toward Caesarism [the rule of benevolent dictators like Julius Caesar]. The remarkable feature of this subtle evolution was that it could take place constitutionally, without any illegal move, simply by stretching the extremely pliable fabric of America's political institutions.⁷

Indeed, thanks to Roosevelt's vast expansion of federal power, the relationship between American institutions, the people, and the government was permanently altered; the government now routinely regulates, legislates, or otherwise intrudes on nearly every aspect of American life. That unfortunate state of affairs is the real legacy of the New Deal.

1. Howard Zinn, "Introduction," in Howard Zinn, ed., *New Deal Thought*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966, p. xvi.
2. Quoted in Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression*. New York: Random House, 1970, pp. 251-52.
3. Quoted in Terkel, *Hard Times*, p. 291.
4. Raymond Moley, *After Seven Years*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939, pp. 399-400.
5. H.L. Mencken, "Three Years of Dr. Roosevelt," *The American Mercury* (1936), quoted in William E. Leuchtenburg, ed., *The New Deal: A Documentary History*. New York: Harper and Row, 1968, p. 201.
6. Amaury de Riencourt, "Caesarism Comes to America," in Morton Keller, ed., *The New Deal: What Was It?* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963, p. 107.
7. de Riencourt, "Caesarism," in Keller, *The New Deal*, p. 108.

Analyze: A Nation in Transition, 1920-1939: The New Deal: A Success?

Dilemma Perspective: The Folly of New Deal Policies

Throughout the inauguration and the First Hundred Days of the first Roosevelt administration, the excitement over a new president open to any new idea was palpable. One economic adviser, Gardiner C. Means, characterized the sentiment well: "As for those first New Deal days, much of the excitement came from improvisation. Nothing was fully set in the minds of the people there. They were open to fresh ideas. Always." After three hard years of economic contraction, the citizenry was fed up with Herbert Hoover and awestruck by the ebullient Franklin D. Roosevelt. But brimming confidence and enthusiasm could not whip the Depression, nor could improvisation and experimentation. While politically expedient and exciting among the populace, many New Deal programs were fiscally irresponsible, worked at cross purposes, and hindered real economic growth so direly that worldwide military conflict alone could reinvigorate it.



Intending to foster an atmosphere of cooperation with business and industry early on, Roosevelt's first appointments included free trade advocate Cordell Hull as Secretary of State and industrialist and Republican William Woodin as head of the Treasury Department. While these appointments were meant to put on airs of collaboration, policymaking would soon become decidedly socialistic. Among the first programs created was the Public Works Administration (PWA). The intention of the PWA was to provide immediate relief in the form of jobs. Among its many accomplishments is the Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River in Washington, towering today as the largest concrete structure in the United States. On the surface, this project is laudable for its immediate relief for the unemployed. However, through this project one arm of the government created new farmlands (by creating irrigation control and vast new arable land) while another arm, the Agricultural Adjustment Agency (AAA) was concurrently paying farmers not to farm and to destroy crops and livestock, a policy which led to further unemployment. Further, the AAA was raising its revenue to pay farmers by taxing farm crop processors who in turn passed this tax on to consumers. Thus, fallow and untilled lands slowly increased crop prices at a time when cash-strapped consumers could already ill-afford groceries.



At a time of widespread unemployment and disaffection, Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA) both in 1933. Each program sought to restore dignity to the forgotten man by creating temporary public works jobs. Wildly popular among the working class, these programs garnered criticism as "shovel-leaning" projects that discouraged hard work and independence. Later, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) would endure similar scrutiny for encouraging torpidity and engaging in partisan politics by hiring for major projects through local Democratic Party organizations. One such

telling example developed over the Federal Theater, a WPA-funded project that produced left-leaning pro-New Deal dramas. Criticism by Rep. Martin Dies of this political nepotism were met on stage with "Leaning on a Shovel":

At Home we always linger
 And read Karl Marx
 If you don't believe us—ask the Dies Committee.
 Miles of roads and highways, too,
 And schools and buildings bright and new—

Although it may seem odd to you
We did it—by leaning on a shovel!

But squander public monies the New Dealers did. One CWA project employed researchers to study the history of the safety pin, another to chase birds away from public buildings. Later, a WPA project controlled crickets in Wyoming. While this kind of job creation may have put people back to work restoring their dignity, this diversion of public resources sowed deep instabilities in the economy by preventing workers from finding real, sustainable, productive employment that would have advanced the economy.

Another ill-conceived policy was the National Recovery Administration (NRA). The broad purpose here was to force cooperation between labor and management through price and working condition codes. Before being ruled unconstitutional in 1935, the NRA disillusioned all parties by working at contradictory goals and interests. Labor complained that the program gave businessmen too great a role in creation of the codes. Small businesses felt disadvantaged and complained of red tape. Big business balked at the growing power and clout of unions (a result of the NRA's Section 7a) and fired those who signed up, sparking over 1,800 strikes in 1934. Workers walked off the job protesting working conditions that did not adhere to codes. Indeed, most historians today label the NRA, as an engine of recovery, a complete failure. Others go further citing the 40% increase in cost to do business as an albatross around the economy's neck. Austrian-school economist Benjamin Anderson even wrote that economic recovery was already visible in early 1933 before the government's meddling in the economy through the NRA. Government intervention instead hindered recovery already in process and created confusion and speculation in the marketplace.



In spite of Roosevelt's ineffective first term and rising criticism, in 1936, voters handed him an electoral mandate as he carried all states except Maine and Vermont. Factors mitigating the public's perception of Roosevelt's policy failures must have been his admitted charm and personality, the salvation of the forgotten man's dignity, and the middle-road policies between radical socialism and unfeeling capitalism. Indeed, radical socialist criticism hinged upon the belief that capitalism had truly failed and that Roosevelt himself squandered the first real chance for an industrialized society to embark on Karl Marx's revolution. However, historians during the past 30 years have generally concluded that Roosevelt never truly possessed the opportunity to reconfigure American society along the lines touted by Father Coughlin, Huey Long, or even Upton Sinclair. Instead, the political climate, system of government in place, and cultural mores disallowed an overhaul of the American fabric as most citizens simply wanted a more honest capitalism.

By 1937, the New Deal was in shambles. Policies such as tax revision, the Wagner Act, and even the court-packing scandal undermined confidence among employers. Social Security taxes on payroll cut into salaries and reduced employment. Then, a series of increases by the Fed in the reserve requirements of member banks caused a contraction in the money supply. When Roosevelt sharply reduced spending in an effort to balance the budget and reign in inflation, this sent the economy reeling once again. Already in 1937 had Roosevelt created quasi-dependent denizens of the new activist government through his proto-Keynesian policies such that there was no turning back. This "Roosevelt recession" led to defections even within the ranks of New Dealers. By 1938, the economy still faltering, Roosevelt had no choice but to reverse policy again. Massive new federal spending still did not end the recession and the economy limped along until the military spending of the early 1940s.

Thus, by late 1938, Roosevelt's vacillating policies, from suspending antitrust legislation to enforcing it, from balanced budgets to deliberate deficits, from expansion of the money supply to contraction, indicated massive

confusion and ignorance as to how combat the Depression. And that confusion and vacillation was echoed in the economy. In his acclaimed *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960*, Milton Friedman scrutinized New Deal policies and argued that they exacerbated the Depression. These policies "hampered recovery from the contraction, prolonged and added to unemployment, and set the stage for ever more intrusive and costly government."

The "we'll try any policy once" mentality may have earned Roosevelt clout among constituents in search of signs that their government was at least attempting something, but it created volatility in the marketplace when steadiness was what it needed most. Vestiges of New Deal works projects seem to testify to a successful program today, but the thousands of school buildings, post offices, and bridges across the country represent a significant opportunity cost that counterfactual historians will have to evaluate. The New Deal, though it communicated humane compassion for the individual's woes, did not cure the Depression, nor did it significantly reduce the nation's suffering. Instead, in its nadir it was saved by an international calamity that would distract from the failed policies and unify the nation under the common purpose of defending political and economic freedom.

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[back to top](#)

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Analyze: A Nation in Transition, 1920-1939: The New Deal: A Success?

Dilemma Perspective: The New Deal Did Not End the Great Depression

Addressing the question of the New Deal's effectiveness in combating the Great Depression depends on the context in which the question is viewed. The New Deal did not end the Great Depression but it did make it easier to live with. What to consider is not so much whether or not the New Deal ended the Depression (most scholars agree that it did not) but rather why it failed, would it have succeeded had not World War II intervened, and why was it a political and social success in spite of its economic failure?



It is frequently argued that the New Deal did not pursue a consistent ideological agenda. Critics charge that it was subject to too many contradictory influences and that it was too experimental and opportunistic to deal effectively with the Depression. Conservative opponents of the New Deal, both then and now, point to the failure of the Roosevelt administration's economic policies to foster growth in the private sector and provide an environment of stability to encourage private investment. Liberals, on the other hand, blame Roosevelt for failing to follow a consistent policy of deficit spending designed to "prime the pump," as advocated by British economist John Maynard Keynes.

The conflict within the Administration over how to combat the 1937–1938 recession reflects the contradictions in Roosevelt's economic policies. Administration liberals advocated immediate increases in federal spending on work relief programs to stimulate the economy—deficit spending to "prime the pump" as supported by Keynesian economists. Roosevelt, in meetings with his economic advisers in mid-1937, seemed to agree with this approach. At the same time, however, the president sought, through such moderates in his cabinet as Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, to conciliate the business community by promising a balanced budget.

The New Deal's identity was never more vigorously or urgently debated than during this recession within a depression. To the dismay of the Keynesians, Roosevelt moved with snail-like slowness toward resolving the contradictions besetting his administration's economic policies. For most of 1937, Roosevelt took no action while the debate between budget balancers and supporters of deficit spending and between pro-business advisers and those who wanted to increase government regulation and pursue antitrust policies ground on. In the end, Roosevelt did a little bit of everything.

In April 1938, he acceded to the pleas of the spenders and requested from Congress an emergency appropriation of \$3 billion to increase funding for the WPA and other work relief programs. Although many observers praised this decision as a sign that the president had finally accepted deficit financing as a tool to end the Depression, in the overall economic picture, the measure accomplished very little. This victory for the spenders was probably moot. By the end of 1938, the New Deal reform program was stalled in the face of a conservative coalition of southern Democrats and midwestern Republicans in Congress and deepening international tension that demanded a shift away from domestic reform and toward increased military spending.



Historians who argue that Roosevelt could have ended the Depression sooner by consistently following Keynesian economic principles may be correct. However, they miss two key points: First, at the start of his presidency, Roosevelt did not envision the New Deal as a program to foster economic growth. His short-range goals were the

alleviation of the plight of the unemployed and the reform of a flawed economic structure. Second, Roosevelt was fundamentally an economic conservative who, as historian George McJimsey points out, was "always a partisan of the balanced budget." He saw work relief, through such programs as the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and other work relief agencies, as a short-term solution to unemployment.

Such New Deal structural reform measures as banking reform and the regulation of the stock market through the Securities Exchange Act were aimed at creating a safer economic infrastructure and a more stable business environment for investors. Roosevelt eventually supported social insurance (which came into existence with the Social Security Act in 1935) as a long-term solution to economic insecurity. In Roosevelt's frame of reference, these measures would create conditions for private enterprise to recover from the Depression.



There was a fundamental departure from the New Deal's reform orientation in 1938 in the form of Roosevelt's decision to embrace the Keynesian approach of stimulating economic growth through deficit financing. With New Deal reforms stalled in Congress, it was the only political option upon which all sides in the debate could agree. It is entirely possible that this approach would have worked eventually even had increased defense spending and British war orders in 1940–1941 not sped the process up.

A central question remains: If the New Deal was an economic failure, why did it enjoy such overwhelming political success from 1933 to 1938, and why did it have such dramatic long-term effects? The key to the New Deal's political success is precisely the emphasis Roosevelt and his advisers placed on short-term solutions and on helping unemployed middle- and working-class Americans. Such work relief programs as the WPA showed tangible results in a period when voters needed to see tangible results. Indeed, in the 1936 elections, 80% of WPA workers voted for Roosevelt. Similarly, the Social Security Act, creation of the Federal Housing Authority, and the National Labor Relations Act were all aimed at key political constituencies.

The source of the New Deal's long-term political success lay in the institutional arrangements it left in place. As David Kennedy has observed, these arrangements "constituted a more coherent pattern than is dreamt of in many philosophies. That pattern can be summarized in a single word—security." Social Security and unemployment insurance minimized the impact of economic dislocation on workers. Banking reforms—mainly the creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation—have minimized the potential impact of bank failures on small depositors. The New Deal did not end the Depression but the reforms enacted under its umbrella have prevented a recurrence.

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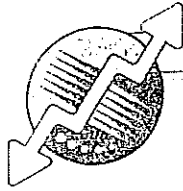
[back to top](#)

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VIEWPOINTS

On the New Deal

The New Deal affected the lives of nearly all Americans and almost everyone had an opinion about it. Read the following viewpoints about the New Deal. Then answer the questions that follow.

AGAINST THE NEW DEAL

*Raymond Moley, one of Roosevelt's original Brain Trust, from *Hard Times*, by Studs Terkel*

The first New Deal was a radical departure from American life. It put more power in the central Government. At the time, it was necessary, especially in the farm area of our economy. Left to itself, farming was in a state of anarchy. Beyond that, there was no need to reorganize in industry. We merely needed to get the farms prospering again and create a market for the industrial products in the cities.

The second New Deal was an entirely different thing. My disenchantment began then. Roosevelt didn't follow any particular policy after 1936. Our economy began to slide downhill—our unemployment increased—after that, until 1940. This is something liberals are not willing to recognize. It was the war that saved the economy and saved Roosevelt. . . .

[Roosevelt] began to bring in the radical elements, who up to that time had not been in support of him. Business went along with him in his early reforms, but after 1937, it began to be nervous about where he was going. He was improvising all the time. Hit or miss. . . .

In 1935, I took a firm stand. I said welfare is a narcotic, because it will never end. We'll have to stop this business and put people to work. The best way to put people to work is to encourage the development of industrial science. The Government can't put people to work.

From *HARD TIMES* by Studs Terkel. Copyright © 1970 by Studs Terkel. Published by Pantheon Books.

AGAINST THE NEW DEAL

*1939 testimony by Sam T. Mayhew, an African American who voted Republican; collected in *Such As Us* (1978)*

All the prosperity he has brought to the country has been legislated and is not real. Nothing he has ever started has been finished. My common way of expressing it is that we are in the middle of the ocean like a ship without an anchor. No good times can come to the country as long as there is so much discrimination practiced. . . .

Take me: I have applied for work at the welfare office, tried hard to get work. All they had for me, they said, came under the unskilled head. I tried one of these jobs—digging ditches for the sanitary department of the board of health. With my artificial limb, I simply couldn't compete with the other men who were digging ditches. . . .

Then I applied again for work, for something in the skilled labor line. I had seen men overseeing groups of workers, keeping their time, and so forth, and this I knew I could do as well as anybody. They told me that only white men had these jobs, that I would have to take something in the unskilled classification or none. . . . Because of my color, I must ditch or work on the road, in spite of my college training and in spite of physical handicaps from amputation and high blood pressure. . . .

I don't think that discrimination is intended at Washington, but here in this county the colored race has no chance to get a job when it's a choice between colors. I don't see much chance for our people to get anywhere when the color line instead of ability determines the opportunities to get ahead economically.

Adapted from *SUCH AS US*, edited by Tom E. Terrill and Jerrold Hirsch. Copyright © 1978 by The University of North Carolina Press.



Analyze: A Nation in Transition, 1920-1939: The New Deal: A Success?

Dilemma Closing: How successful was the New Deal in pulling America out of the Great Depression?

The Great Depression was a time in American history when a quarter of the population was jobless; many people struggled to feed, house, and clothe themselves and their families; and businesses and banks failed regularly. President Franklin D. Roosevelt attempted to change the course of the Great Depression with his innovative series of relief policies, dubbed the "New Deal." While improving quality of life and ending the Great Depression was the foremost aim of the New Deal, these things did not truly happen until the start of World War II. All three of our Perspective authors agree that the New Deal alone did not end the Great Depression; each has his own opinion, however, as to how effective and successful the New Deal actually was.

Chris Mullin emphasizes that without Roosevelt's New Deal policies, the U.S. economy would not have recovered quickly enough to meet the international demand for war goods and services initiated by World War II. The New Deal was, therefore, a success in that it stimulated economic growth and, equally important, allowed Roosevelt to maintain a capitalist free market; conversely, when faced with the same dilemmas, much of Europe had embraced socialist or communist policies as a measure of control.

Brett Piersma does not dispute the effectiveness of some New Deal programs in his essay, but he reminds the reader that the majority of Roosevelt's programs, such as the Agricultural Adjustment Agency (AAA), were nonsensical at best, and destructive at worst. Too many of the New Deal programs, Piersma maintains, were irresponsible, worked at cross purposes, and hindered real economic growth. As long as the majority of New Deal policies set the economy back rather than forward, any victories they might have achieved were hollow ones.

Dr. Walter Bell carries the argument to its natural conclusion by focusing on the kind of success the New Deal experienced rather than the end results of the actual programs. Dr. Bell looks at Roosevelt's goals when he created the New Deal and then evaluates Roosevelt's success. He also maintains that one cannot overlook the tremendous popularity of the New Deal, which, he says, rendered it an overwhelming political success.

ID: 1168050

[back to top](#)

