

24

The Great Depression and the New Deal

1929–1939



FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT SAILING AT CAMPOBELLO ISLAND, MAINE, 1916
(FDR Library)

RUGGED CAMPOBELLO

ISLAND, lying off Eastport, Maine, was sunlit that August afternoon in 1921. A small sailboat bobbed in the waters off the island. At the helm, with several of his children, was thirty-nine-year-old **Franklin Delano Roosevelt**. Assistant secretary of the navy during World War I, Roosevelt had been the Democratic Party's vice-presidential candidate in 1920. But all this was far from his mind now. He loved sailing, and he loved Campobello Island.

The idyllic afternoon took an ominous turn when Roosevelt spotted a fire. Beaching the boat, he and the children frantically beat back the flames. The exertion left Roosevelt unusually fatigued. The next morning his left leg dragged, and soon both legs became paralyzed. He had suffered an attack of poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis), a viral infection that most often struck children but sometimes adults as well. Except for a cumbersome shuffle with crutches and heavy metal braces, he would never walk again.

This illness changed the lives of both Franklin Roosevelt and his wife, **Eleanor Roosevelt**. To Franklin, it seemed the end of his career. But he endured endless therapy and gradually reentered politics. In 1928, laboriously mounting the podium at the Democratic National Convention, he nominated his friend Al Smith for president. That fall, he himself was elected governor of New York.

Roosevelt's disability, although mostly concealed by the media, profoundly shaped his personality. Somewhat superficial and even arrogant before 1921, this privileged only child became, through his ordeal, more understanding of the disadvantaged and far more determined. "If you had spent two years in bed trying to wiggle your big toe," he once said, "after that everything else would seem easy!"

Along with child-rearing duties, Eleanor Roosevelt at first devoted herself to her husband's care. But she also encouraged his return to politics, resisting his domineering mother's efforts to turn him into an invalid at the family home at Hyde Park, New York. Already involved with social issues, Eleanor now became active in the New York Democratic Party and edited its newsletter for women. Painfully shy, she forced herself to make public speeches.

The Roosevelts would soon need the qualities of character they had acquired. Elected president in 1932 amid the worst depression in U.S. history, Franklin Roosevelt dominated U.S. politics until his death in 1945. The early years of Roosevelt's long presidency, the era of the so-called New Deal, spawned a dizzying array of laws, agencies, and programs. But certain patterns do emerge. In what some label the First New Deal (1933–1935), the dual themes were relief and recovery through a united national effort. In 1935, challenged politically from both the left and right, Roosevelt charted a more radical course. The so-called Second New Deal (1935 and after), placed less

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT This idealized painting captures the exuberance FDR projected, and the hope his optimism inspired. (FDR Library)

Crash and Depression, 1929–1932 (p. 730)

Black Thursday and the Onset of the Depression 730

Hoover's Response 731

Mounting Discontent and Protest 731

The Election of 1932 734

The New Deal Takes Shape, 1933–1935 (p. 734)

Roosevelt and His Circle 734

The Hundred Days 736

Problems and Controversies Plague the Early New Deal 738

1934–1935: Challenges from Right and Left 740

The New Deal Changes Course, 1935–1936 (p. 742)

Expanding Federal Relief 742

The Social Security Act of 1935; End of the Second New Deal 744

The 1936 Roosevelt Landslide and the New Democratic Coalition 745

The Environment and the West 747

The New Deal's End Stage, 1937–1939 (p. 747)

FDR and the Supreme Court 747

The Roosevelt Recession 748

Final Measures; Growing Opposition 748

Social Change and Social Action in the 1930s (p. 749)

The Depression's Psychological and Social Impact 750

Industrial Workers Unionize 751

Black and Hispanic Americans Resist Racism and Exploitation 752

A New Deal for Native Americans 754

The American Cultural Scene in the 1930s (p. 754)

Avenues of Escape: Radio and the Movies 755

The Later 1930s: Opposing Fascism; Reaffirming Traditional Values 755

Streamlining and a World's Fair: Corporate America's Utopian Vision 759

emphasis on unity and more on business regulation and on policies benefiting workers, small farmers, sharecroppers, migrant laborers, and others at the lower end of the scale.

The New Deal involved countless programs, agencies, and sometimes squabbling officials. But in the public mind, it meant Roosevelt. Loved by some and reviled by others, Roosevelt was a consummate politician whose administration set the national agenda for a generation.

This chapter develops two themes. The first is the New Deal's expansive view of the government's role in promoting economic and social welfare. The second is the response of the American people to the Depression. From factory workers, urban blacks, and Hispanic migrant laborers to moviemakers, artists, writers, and photographers, diverse groups met the crisis with resourcefulness, creativity, and organized social action.

FOCUS Questions

- What caused the Great Depression, and how did President Hoover respond?
- What strategy guided the early New Deal, and what problems and challenges arose in 1934–1935?
- What key measures and setbacks marked the course of the New Deal from 1935 on?
- How did the depression and the New Deal affect specific social groups in the United States?
- What key developments shaped American culture in the 1930s?

Crash and Depression, 1929–1932

The prosperity of the 1920s ended in October 1929 with the stock market collapse. The Wall Street crash, and the economic problems that underlay it, launched a depression that hit every household. President Hoover struggled to respond, but his commitment to private initiative and his horror of direct federal intervention limited his effectiveness. In November 1932, voters turned to the Democratic Party and its leader, Franklin Roosevelt. This set the stage for a vast federal response to the economic and social crisis.

Black Thursday and the Onset of the Depression

Stock prices had risen through much of the 1920s, but 1928–1929 brought a frenzied upsurge as speculators plunged into the market. In 1925, the market value of all stocks had stood at about \$27 billion; by October 1929, it hit \$87 billion. With stockbrokers lending buyers up to 75 percent of a stock's cost, credit or “margin” buying spread. The income-tax cuts promoted by Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon had increased the flow of money into the market. Upbeat statements also fed the boom. In March 1929, former president Calvin Coolidge declared stocks “cheap at current prices.” “Investment trusts,” akin to today's mutual funds, lured novices into the market. The construction industry faltered in 1928–1929, signaling a decline in the housing market and in business expansion.

In 1928, and again in September 1929, the Federal Reserve Board tried to dampen speculation by raising the interest rate on Federal Reserve notes. Early in 1929, the Fed warned member banks to restrain their lending. But with speculators paying up to 20 percent interest to buy more stock, lending institutions continued to loan money freely—equivalent to dumping gasoline on a raging fire (see Figure 24.1).

The collapse came on October 24, 1929—“Black Thursday.” As prices fell, some stocks found no buyers at all: they had become worthless. In the ensuing weeks, feeble upswings alternated with further plunges.

President Hoover, in the first of many optimistic statements, pronounced the economy “sound and prosperous.” After a weak upswing early in 1930, the economy went into a long tailspin, producing a full-scale depression.

Economists probing the depression's underlying causes focus on structural problems that made 1920s' prosperity highly unstable. Agriculture remained depressed throughout the decade. In the industrial sector, wage increases lagged behind factory output, reducing consumer purchasing power. At the same time, assembly-line methods encouraged overproduction. By summer 1929, not only housing, but also the automobile, textile, tire, and other major industries were seriously overextended. Further, key industries such as railroads, steel, textiles, and mining lagged technologically in the 1930s and could not attract the investment needed to stimulate recovery.

Some economists, called monetarists, also blame the Federal Reserve System's tight-money policies in the early 1930s. This policy, they argue, strangled any hope of recovery by reducing the capital available to businesses for investment and growth.

All analysts link the U.S. depression to a global economic crisis. European economies, struggling

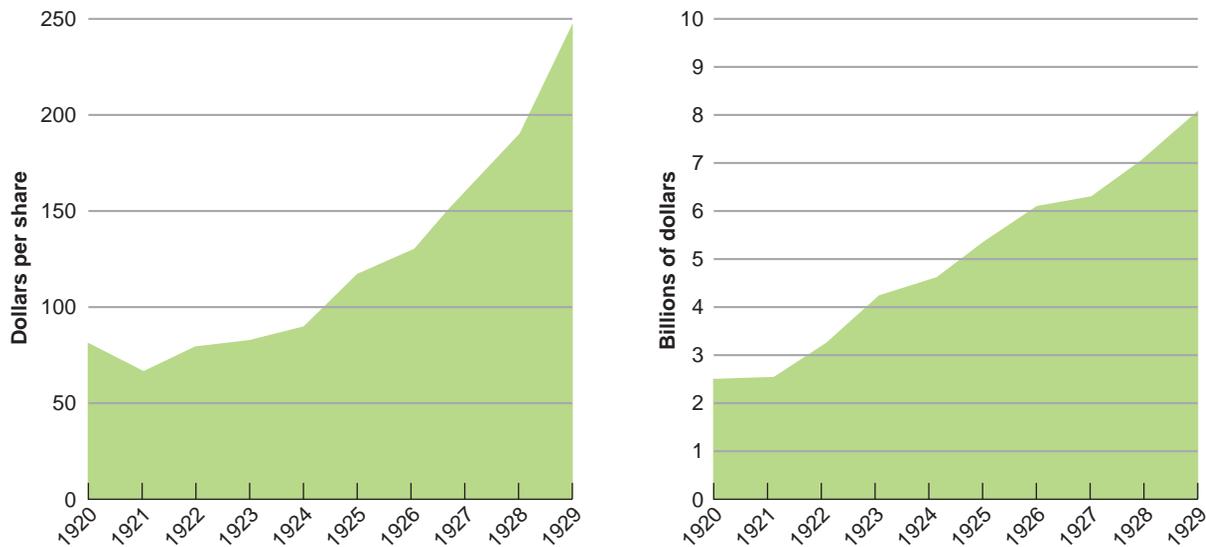


FIGURE 24.1 CONSUMER BORROWING IN THE 1920s Americans plunged heavily into debt in the 1920s to play the stock market and to buy their new Fords, Chevrolets, and consumer products. By 1929, their total debt stood at about \$8 billion.

with war-debt payments and a severe trade imbalance with the United States, collapsed in 1931, crippling the U.S. export market.

The worsening depression devastated the U.S. economy. From 1929 to 1932, the gross national product dropped from \$104 billion to \$59 billion. Farm prices, already low, fell by nearly 60 percent. By early 1933 more than fifty-five hundred banks had closed, and unemployment stood at 25 percent, or nearly 13 million workers (see Figure 24.2). In some cities, the jobless rate surged far higher. Many who still had jobs faced cuts in pay and hours.

Hoover's Response

Historically, Americans had viewed depressions as similar to natural disasters: little could be done other than ride out the storm. President Hoover disagreed. Drawing upon his experience as U.S. food administrator in World War I and as secretary of commerce, Hoover initially responded boldly. But his belief in private initiative limited his options.

Hoover urged business leaders to maintain wages and employment. Viewing unemployment as a local issue, he advised city and state officials to create public-works projects. In October 1930, he set up an Emergency Committee for Employment to coordinate voluntary relief efforts. In 1931, he persuaded the nation's largest banks to create a private lending agency to help smaller banks make business loans.

Despite these initiatives, public opinion turned against Hoover. In the 1930 midterm election, the Republicans lost the House of Representatives and gave up eight Senate seats. In 1931, dreading a budget deficit, Hoover called for a tax increase, further

angering hard-pressed Americans. That same year, despite their pledges, U.S. Steel and other big corporations slashed wages. The crisis swamped private charities and local welfare agencies. Philadelphia, with more than three hundred thousand jobless by 1932, cut weekly relief payments to \$4.23 per family and then stopped them entirely.

In 1932, a presidential election year, Hoover swallowed his principles and took a bold step. In January, at Hoover's recommendation, Congress set up a new agency, the **Reconstruction Finance Corporation** (RFC), to make loans to banks and other lending institutions. By July, the RFC had pumped \$1.2 billion into the economy. The RFC also granted \$2 billion to state and local governments for job-creating public-works programs, and allocated \$750 million for loans to struggling businesses.

Hoover supported these measures reluctantly, warning that they could lead to "socialism and collectivism." Blaming global forces for the depression, he argued that only international measures would help. His call for a moratorium on war-debt and reparations payments by European nations made sense, but seemed irrelevant to the plight of ordinary Americans. As Hoover urged self-help and local initiative and predicted recovery "just around the corner," his unpopularity deepened.

Hoover predicted recovery "just around the corner."

Mounting Discontent and Protest

An ominous mood spread as the jobless waited in breadlines, trudged the streets, and rode freight

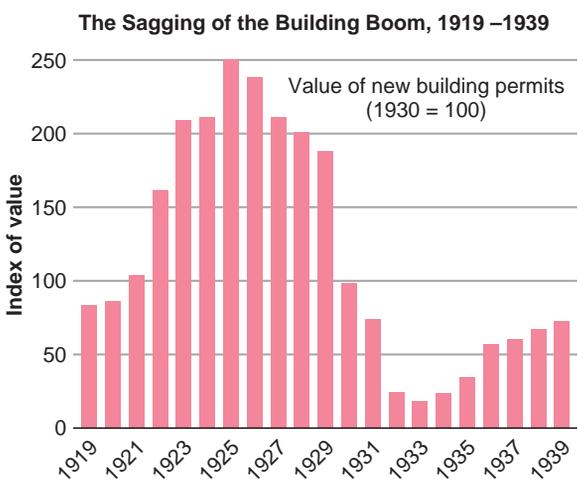
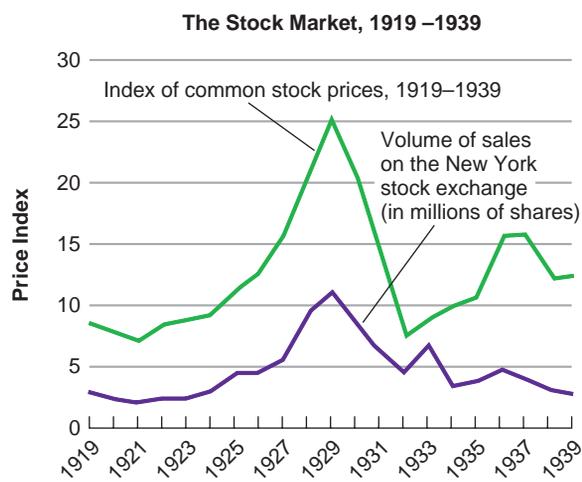
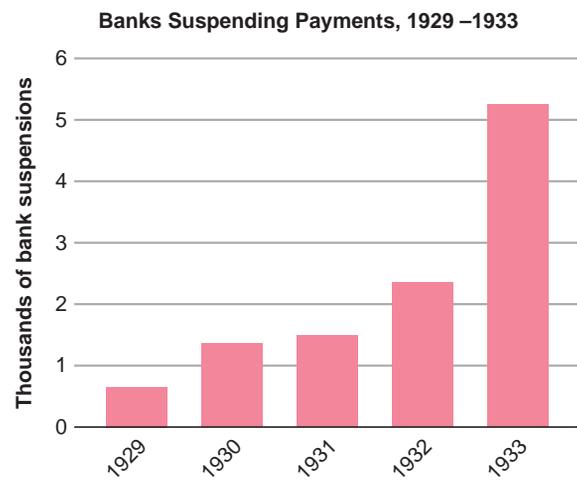
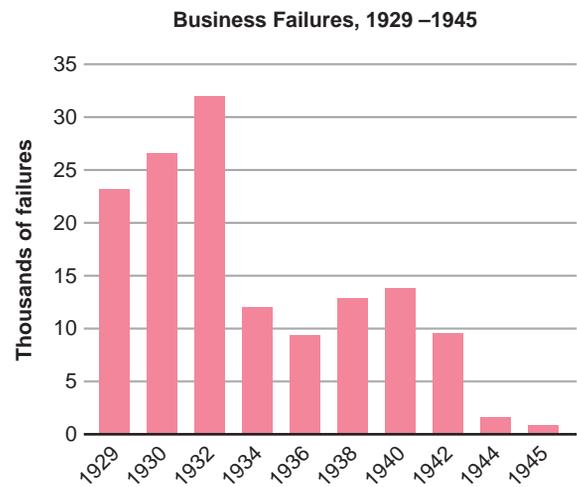
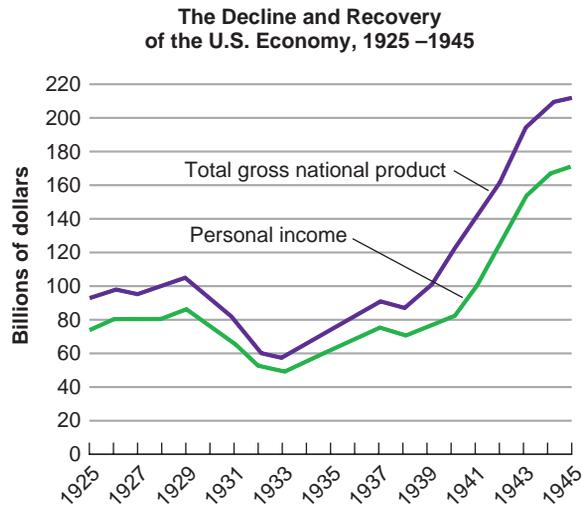


FIGURE 24.2 THE STATISTICS OF HARD TIMES Figures on the gross national product, personal income, unemployment, the stock market, and business failures all show the Depression’s shattering impact, with gradual and uneven improvement as the 1930s wore on.

Sources: Thomas C. Cochran, *The Great Depression and World War II: 1929–1945* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1968); Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975).



BURNING SHANTIES OF BONUS MARCHERS, WASHINGTON, D.C., JULY 1932 When President Herbert Hoover ordered the army to evict jobless veterans who had come to Washington seeking early payment of promised bonuses, it reinforced his public image as aloof and uncaring amid a worsening depression. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

trains seeking work. Americans reared on the ethic of hard work and self-reliance found chronic unemployment deeply demoralizing.

The *New York Times* described “Hoover Valley”—a section of Central Park where jobless men lived in boxes and packing crates, keeping warm with layers of newspapers they bitterly called Hoover blankets. The suicide rate soared. In Youngstown, Ohio, a jobless father of ten whose family faced eviction jumped to his death from a bridge. Violence threatened in some cities when landlords evicted families unable to pay their rent.

Many farmers lost their lands because of tax delinquency, with Iowa and the Dakotas especially hard hit. At some forced farm auctions, neighbors bought the foreclosed farm for a trivial sum, and returned it to the evicted family.

In 1931, midwestern farmers organized a movement called the Farmers’ Holiday Association to force prices up by withholding grain and livestock from the market. Dairy farmers angered by low prices dumped milk in Iowa and Wisconsin.

The most alarming protest came from World War I veterans. In 1924, Congress had voted veterans a bonus stretched over a twenty-year period. In June 1932, some ten thousand veterans, many jobless, descended on Washington to lobby for immediate payment of these bonuses. When Congress refused, most of the “bonus marchers” went home, but about two thousand stayed on, building makeshift shelters on the outskirts of Washington. President Hoover called in the army.

On July 28, troops commanded by General Douglas MacArthur and armed with tear gas,

tanks, and machine guns drove the veterans from their camp and burned their shelters. A journalist described the scene:

[The veterans and their families] wandered from street to street or sat in ragged groups, the men exhausted, the women with wet handkerchiefs laid over their smarting eyes, the children waking from sleep to cough and whimper from the tear gas in their lungs. . . . Their shanties and tents had been burned, their personal property destroyed, except for the few belongings they could carry on their backs.

To many Americans, this action symbolized the administration's heartlessness.

American writers shared the despairing mood. In *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), John Dos Passos drew a dark panorama of the United States as money-mad, exploitive, and lacking spiritual meaning. Says one character: "Everything you've wanted crumbles in your fingers as you grasp it." In *Young Lonigan* (1932), James T. Farrell portrayed the empty existence of a working-class Irish-immigrant youth in Chicago. Jobless and betrayed by the American dream, he aimlessly wanders the streets.

Some radical novelists openly attacked the capitalist system. The Communist Party encouraged such fiction through writers' clubs and contests for working-class writers. Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933) dealt with life in the Missouri coal fields, where his own father and brother had died in a mine disaster.

The Election of 1932

Gloom pervaded the 1932 Republican convention that renominated Hoover. The Democrats gathered in Chicago, by contrast, scented victory. Their platform, crafted to erase the party divisions of the 1920s,

appealed to urban voters with a call for repeal of prohibition, to farmers with support for aid programs, and to fiscal conservatives with demands for a balanced budget and spending cuts. Rejecting Al Smith, the party's

1928 candidate, the delegates nominated New York governor Franklin D. Roosevelt for president.

Breaking precedent, FDR flew to Chicago to accept the nomination in person. Despite a rousing speech pledging "a new deal for the American people," Roosevelt's campaign offered few specifics. He called for "bold persistent experimentation" and compassion for "the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid," yet he also attacked Hoover's "reckless" spending and insisted that "only as a last resort" should Washington play a larger depression-fighting role.

But Roosevelt exuded confidence, and above all he was not Hoover. On November 8, FDR and his running mate, Texas congressman John Nance Garner, received nearly 23 million votes, while Hoover received fewer than 16 million. Roosevelt carried every state but Pennsylvania and four in New England. Both houses of Congress went heavily Democratic.

How would Roosevelt use this impressive mandate? The nation waited.

The New Deal Takes Shape, 1933–1935

The Roosevelt years began in a whirl of activity. An array of emergency measures reflected three basic goals: industrial recovery through business-government cooperation and pump-priming federal spending; agricultural recovery through crop reduction; and short-term emergency relief distributed through state and local agencies when possible, but directly by the federal government if necessary. These programs conveyed the sense of an activist government addressing urgent national problems. Hovering over the bustle loomed a confident Franklin Roosevelt, cigarette holder jauntily tilted upward, a symbol of hope. By 1935, however, the New Deal faced problems, and opposition was building.

Roosevelt and His Circle

FDR's inaugural address exuded confidence and hope. "The only thing we have to fear," he intoned, "is fear itself." In an outpouring of support, half a million letters deluged the White House.

Roosevelt seemed an unlikely popular hero. Like his distant cousin Theodore, FDR was of the social elite, with merchants and landowners among his Dutch-immigrant ancestors. He attended Harvard College and Columbia Law School. But as a state senator and governor, he had backed the Democratic Party's urban-immigrant wing. When the depression hit, he had introduced innovative measures in New York, including unemployment insurance and a public-works program. Intent on promoting recovery while preserving capitalism and democracy, Roosevelt encouraged competing proposals, compromised (or papered over) differences, and then backed the measures he sensed that Congress and the public would support.

Roosevelt brought to Washington a circle of advisers nicknamed the brain trust. It included Columbia University professor Rexford G. Tugwell and lawyer Adolph A. Berle. Shaped by the progressive reform tradition, Tugwell and Berle advocated federal economic planning and corporate

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."



ELEANOR ROOSEVELT VISITS A NURSERY SCHOOL IN DES MOINES OPERATED BY THE WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION, JUNE 1936 Intensely shy as a young woman, Mrs. Roosevelt played an active, influential, and highly visible role during her years as First Lady. (*FDR Library*)

regulation. But no single ideology or inner circle controlled the New Deal, for FDR sought a broad range of opinions.

Eleanor Roosevelt played a key role. A niece of Theodore Roosevelt, she had been active in settlement-house work and in Florence Kelley's National Consumers' League. Through her, FDR met reformers, social workers, and advocates of minority rights. Recalled Rexford Tugwell: "No one

who ever saw Eleanor Roosevelt sit down facing her husband, and holding his eyes firmly, say to him 'Franklin, I think you should . . .,' or 'Franklin, surely you will not . . .' will ever forget the experience." Traveling ceaselessly, she was an astute observer for her wheelchair-bound husband. (A Washington newspaper once headlined "MRS. ROOSEVELT SPENDS NIGHT AT WHITE HOUSE.") In 1935, she began a newspaper column, "My Day."

Roosevelt's cabinet reflected the New Deal's diversity. Postmaster General James Farley, FDR's top political adviser, distributed patronage jobs, managed his campaigns, and dealt with state and local Democratic leaders. Secretary of Labor **Frances Perkins**, the first woman cabinet member, had served as industrial commissioner of New York. Interior Secretary **Harold Ickes** had organized liberal Republicans for Roosevelt in 1932. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace held the same post his father had occupied in the 1920s. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., FDR's neighbor and political ally, though a fiscal conservative, tolerated the spending necessary to finance New Deal anti-depression programs.

Newcomers poured into Washington in 1933—former progressives, liberal-minded professors, bright young lawyers. They drafted bills, staffed

government agencies, and debated recovery strategies. From this pressure-cooker environment emerged the laws, programs, and agencies gathered under a catch-all label: the New Deal.

The Hundred Days

Between March and June 1933, a period labeled the “Hundred Days,” Congress enacted more than a dozen key measures (see Table 24.1). Drawing upon precedents from the Progressive Era, World War I, and the Hoover presidency, these measures expanded Washington's involvement in America's economic life.

FDR first addressed the banking crisis. As borrowers defaulted, depositors withdrew savings, and homeowners missed mortgage payments, thousands of banks had failed, undermining confidence in the

TABLE 24.1 MAJOR MEASURES ENACTED DURING THE “HUNDRED DAYS” (MARCH 9–JUNE 16, 1933)

March 9	Emergency Banking Act Set up procedures for managing failed banks, and tightened regulations governing banking practices.
31	Unemployment Relief Act Created Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to provide jobs for young men in public works and conservation projects.
May 12	Agricultural Adjustment Act Created Agricultural Adjustment Administration to raise farm income by cutting production in basic commodities.
12	Federal Emergency Relief Act Appropriated \$500 million for relief grants administered by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA).
18	Tennessee Valley Authority Act Created the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to build dams on the Tennessee River system for power generation, flood and soil-erosion control, recreation.
27	Federal Securities Act Required full disclosure to investors of information relating to stock offerings, and registration of most stock offerings with the Federal Trade Commission.
June 13	Home Owners' Refinancing Act Appropriated \$200 million to the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) to refinance mortgages for nonfarm homeowners.
16	Farm Credit Act Set up procedures to enable farmers to refinance their mortgages and secure loans for their production and marketing operations.
16	Banking Act of 1933 (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation) Insured all bank deposits up to \$5,000; extended powers of Federal Reserve Board to prevent stock speculation.
16	National Industrial Recovery Act Created the National Recovery Administration (NRA) to promote industrial and business recovery; appropriated \$3.3 billion to the Public Works Administration (PWA) for major public-works projects to provide jobs and stimulate the economy.

system. On March 5, Roosevelt ordered all banks to close for four days. At the end of this so-called bank holiday, he proposed an Emergency Banking Act. This law and a later one permitted healthy banks to reopen, set up procedures for managing failed banks, increased government oversight of banking, and required banks to separate savings deposits from investment funds. Congress also created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) to insure bank deposits up to five thousand dollars. Launching a series of radio talks, the president assured Americans that they could again trust their banks.

Other measures addressed the urgent problem of relief for Americans struggling to survive. Two new agencies assisted those who were losing their homes. The Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) helped city-dwellers refinance their mortgages. The Farm Credit Administration provided loans to rural Americans (see Figure 24.3).

Another early relief program, the **Civilian Conservation Corps** (CCC), employed jobless youths in environmentally friendly government projects such as reforestation, park maintenance, and erosion control. By 1935, half a million young men were earning thirty-five dollars a month in CCC camps—a godsend to desperate families.

The principal relief measure of the Hundred Days, the **Federal Emergency Relief Act**, appropriated \$500 million for state and local relief agencies that had exhausted their funds. To head this program, FDR chose **Harry Hopkins**, the relief administrator

in New York State, who soon emerged as a powerful New Deal figure.

While supplying immediate relief, the early New Deal also faced the larger challenge of promoting agricultural and industrial recovery. On the problem of low farm prices, the government advocated reduced production to push up farm income.

As a first step to cutting production, the government paid southern cotton planters to plow under much of their crop and midwestern farmers to slaughter some 6 million piglets and pregnant sows. Destroying crops and killing pigs amid widespread hunger proved a public-relations nightmare. Pursuing the same goal more systematically, Congress in May 1933 passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act. This law gave payments, called subsidies, to producers of the major farm commodities—including hogs, wheat, corn, cotton, and dairy products—in return for cutting production. A tax on grain mills and other food processors (a tax ultimately passed on to consumers) financed these subsidies. A new agency, the **Agricultural Adjustment Administration** (AAA), supervised the program.

The other key recovery measure of the Hundred Days, the National Industrial Recovery Act, appropriated \$3.3 billion for large scale public-works projects to provide jobs and stimulate the economy. The **Public Works Administration** (PWA), headed by Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, ran this program.

This law also created the **National Recovery Administration** (NRA). The NRA brought together

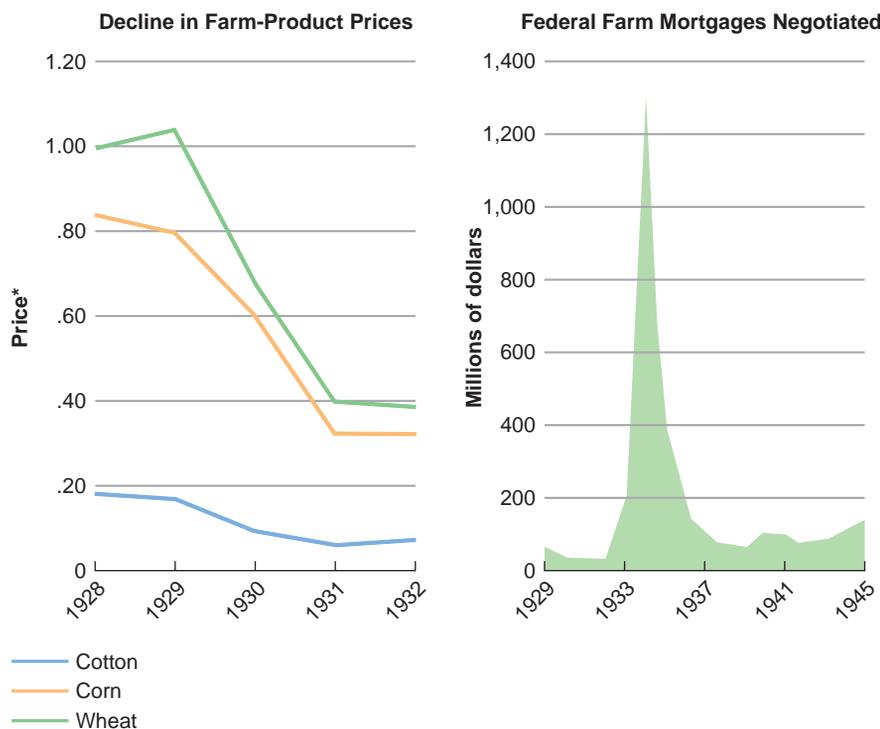


FIGURE 24.3 AGRICULTURE DURING THE GREAT DEPRESSION The depression hit rural America with brutal ferocity, as the statistics on commodity prices and farm mortgages show.

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975) p. 491, 511, 517.

* The graph shows the price per pound for cotton and the price per bushel for corn and wheat.



“WE DO OUR PART” Companies that cooperated with the National Recovery Administration displayed this banner. The NRA, a centerpiece of the early New Deal, soon ran into difficulties. (Collection of Janice L. and David J. Frent)

business leaders to draft codes of “fair competition” for their industries. These codes set production limits, prescribed wages and working conditions, and forbade price cutting and unfair competitive practices. The aim was to promote recovery by breaking the cycle of wage cuts, falling prices, and layoffs. This approach revived the trade associations promoted by

Washington during World War I (see Chapter 22). Indeed, the NRA’s head, Hugh Johnson, had served with the War Industries Board of 1917–1918. The NRA also echoed the theme of business-government cooperation that Herbert Hoover had encouraged as secretary of commerce in the 1920s.

Dependent on voluntary support by business and the public, NRA officials used parades, billboards, magazine ads, and celebrity events to persuade people to patronize companies that subscribed to an NRA code. Such companies displayed the NRA symbol, a blue eagle, and its slogan, “We Do Our Part.”

While the NRA sought economic recovery, some New Dealers also saw its reform potential. Pressured by Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, the NRA’s textile-industry code banned child labor. And thanks to New York senator Robert Wagner, Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act affirmed workers’ right to organize unions.

The Reconstruction Finance Corporation, dating from the Hoover years, remained active, lending

large sums to banks, insurance companies, and even new business ventures. The early New Deal thus had a strong probusiness tone. In his speeches of 1933–1935, FDR always included business in the “all-American team” working for recovery.

A few early measures, however, took a tougher approach to business. A post-1929 antibusiness mood deepened when a Senate investigation revealed that none of the twenty partners of the powerful Morgan Bank had paid any income tax in 1931 or 1932. People jeered when the head of the New York Stock Exchange told a Senate committee considering regulatory measures, “You gentlemen are making a big mistake. The Exchange is a perfect institution.”

Reflecting public support for tougher regulation, the Federal Securities Act of 1933 required corporations to inform the government fully on all stock offerings. This law also made executives personally liable for any misrepresentation of securities their companies issued. In 1934 Congress created the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to enforce the new regulations.

The most innovative program of the Hundred Days was the **Tennessee Valley Authority** (TVA). This program had its origins in a government-built hydroelectric plant on the Tennessee River in Alabama that had powered a World War I munitions factory. In the 1920s, Senator George Norris of Nebraska had urged the use of this facility to supply electricity to nearby farmers.

Expanding Norris’s idea, TVA advanced the economic and social development of the poverty-stricken Tennessee River valley. While creating construction jobs, TVA dams brought electricity to the region, provided recreational facilities, and reduced flooding and soil erosion. Under director David Lilienthal, TVA proved one of the New Deal’s most popular and enduring achievements.

The outpouring of laws and new agencies during the Hundred Days suggests both the dynamism and the confusion of the New Deal. How all these new programs would work in practice remained to be seen.

Problems and Controversies Plague the Early New Deal

As the depression persisted, several early New Deal programs, including the NRA and the AAA, faltered. The NRA’s problems related partly to the personality of the hard-driving, hard-drinking Hugh Johnson, who left in 1934. But the trouble went deeper. As the unity spirit of the Hundred Days faded, corporate America resisted NRA regulation. Code violations increased. Small businesses complained that the codes favored big corporations. The agency itself, meanwhile, became bogged down in drafting trivial codes. The shoulder-pad industry, for example, had

“You gentlemen are making a big mistake. The Exchange is a perfect institution.”

its own code. Corporate trade associations used the codes to stifle competition and fix prices.

In May 1935, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled the NRA unconstitutional. The Court cited two reasons: first, the law gave the president regulatory powers that constitutionally belonged to Congress; second, the NRA regulated commerce inside states, violating the constitutional provision limiting federal regulation to *interstate* commerce. Few mourned. As a recovery measure, the NRA had failed.

The AAA, too, proved controversial. Farm prices did rise as production fell, and from 1933 to 1937 overall farm income increased by 50 percent. But the AAA did not help farm laborers or migrant workers; indeed, its crop-reduction payments actually hurt southern tenants and sharecroppers, who faced eviction as cotton planters removed acreage from production.

Some victims of this process resisted. In 1934, the interracial Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, led by the Socialist Party, emerged in Arkansas. Declared one black sharecropper at the organizing meeting: "The same chain that holds my people holds your people too....[We should] get together and stay together." The landowners struck back, harassing union organizers.

While some New Dealers focused on raising total agricultural income, others took a more class-based approach and urged attention to the poorest farmers. Their cause was strengthened as a parching drought centered in the Oklahoma panhandle turned much of the Great Plains into a dust bowl (see Map 24.1). The rains failed in 1930, devastating wheat and livestock. In 1934, dust clouds spread eastward, darkening the skies over coastal cities. As a dense dust cloud passed over Washington, D.C., one legislator commented: "There goes Oklahoma." Through 1939, each summer brought a new scourge of dust (see *Going to the Source*).

Even night brought no relief. Recalled a Kansas woman, "A trip for water to rinse the grit from our lips, and then back to bed with washcloths over our noses. We try to lie still, because every turn stirs the dust on the blankets." Folk singer Woody Guthrie recalled his 1930s' boyhood in Oklahoma and Texas in a song called "The Great Dust Storm."

Battered by debt and drought, many families gave up. Nearly 3.5 million people left the Great Plains in the 1930s. Some migrated to nearby cities, further swamping relief rolls. Others packed their belongings into old cars and headed west. Though from various states, they all bore a derisive nickname, Okies. The plight of dust-bowl migrants further complicated New Deal agricultural planning.

Policy differences also plagued New Deal relief. As unemployment continued, Harry Hopkins argued for direct federal relief programs, rather than channeling



BUILDING NORRIS DAM ON THE CLINCH RIVER IN TENNESSEE This massive engineering project, named for Senator George Norris, was carried out by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), one of the New Deal's most innovative agencies. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

funds through state and local agencies. Late in 1933, FDR named Hopkins to head a temporary agency, the Civil Works Administration (CWA). Through the winter the CWA funded short-term work projects for the jobless, but when spring came, FDR abolished it. Like his conservative critics, FDR feared creating a permanent underclass living on welfare. As local relief agencies ran out of money, however, further federal programs became inevitable.

Hopkins and Harold Ickes, head of the Public Works Administration, competed to control federal relief policy. Large-scale PWA projects did promote recovery, but the cautious Ickes examined every proposal in minute detail, leaving relief funds stalled in the pipeline. Hopkins, by contrast, wanted to put people to work, even at make-work projects like raking leaves and collecting litter, and

"The same chain that holds my people holds your people too....[We should] get together and stay together."



MAP 24.1 THE DUST BOWL From the Dakotas southward to the Mexican border, farmers in the Great Plains suffered from a lack of rainfall and severe soil erosion in the 1930s, worsening the hardships of the Great Depression.

get money circulating. Given the urgent crisis, Hopkins’s approach proved more influential.

Despite problems and rivalries, the public works programs of the PWA and WPA not only created jobs but reshaped the nation’s infrastructure and promoted economic development. With projects throughout the nation, these agencies built dams, public buildings, airports, highways, bridges, viaducts, dams, water utilities, and sewage-treatment plants. The military factories and war-workers’ housing construction of World War II and the public housing and interstate highway system of the postwar era would all reflect the legacy of these New Deal agencies.

1934–1935: Challenges from Right and Left

Despite the New Deal’s initiatives, the depression persisted. In 1934 national income rose about 25 percent above 1933 levels but remained far below that of 1929. Millions had been jobless for three or four years. The rising frustration found expression

in 1934 in nearly two thousand strikes, some communist-led. With the NRA under attack, conflict flaring over farm policy, and relief spending growing, criticism mounted. Conservatives attacked the New Deal as socialistic. In 1934, several business leaders, joined by an embittered

Al Smith, formed the anti-New Deal American Liberty League. Anti-Roosevelt jokes circulated among the rich, many of whom denounced him as a traitor to his class.

But the New Deal remained popular, reflecting both its promise and FDR’s commanding political skills, enhanced by speechwriters and publicists. Pursuing his “national unity” theme, he exhorted Americans to join the battle for economic recovery just as they had united for war in 1917. Although Republican newspaper publishers remained hostile, FDR enjoyed good relations with the working press, and journalists responded with favorable stories.

Unlike Hoover, Roosevelt loved public appearances and took naturally to radio. Frances Perkins described his radio talks, nicknamed “fireside chats”: “His head would nod and his hands would move in simple, natural, comfortable gestures. His face would smile and light up as though he were actually sitting... with [his listeners].” Roosevelt’s mastery of radio would provide a model for politicians of the television era.

The 1934 midterm election ratified the New Deal’s popularity. Reversing the usual pattern, the Democrats increased their congressional majorities. As for FDR, Kansas journalist William Allen White observed, “He’s been all but crowned by the people.”

Despite this outcome, the political scene remained unstable. While conservatives criticized the New Deal for going too far, critics on the left attacked it for not going far enough and ridiculed Roosevelt’s efforts to include big business in his “all-American team.”

“His face would smile and light up as though he were actually sitting... with [his listeners].”

Dust Bowl Diary: Life on the Great Plains in the 1930s

The dust storms of the 1930s on the Great Plains, one of the twentieth century's major ecological disasters, resulted from a severe drought plus decades of farming practices that had destroyed the prairie grasses holding the soil in place. These

excerpts from the diary of Ann Marie Low, a young school teacher, convey the reality of the Dust Bowl as she experienced it on her parents' farm near Kensal, North Dakota.

April 25, 1934. Last weekend was the worst dust storm we ever had. . . . [T]he air is just full of dirt coming, literally, for hundreds of miles. It sifts into everything. After we wash the dishes and put them away, so much dust sifts into the cupboard we must wash them again before the next meal. Clothes in the closets are covered with dust. . . . Newspapers say the deaths of many babies and old people are attributed to breathing in so much dirt.

May 21, 1934. . . . Saturday Dad, Bud [her brother], and I planted an acre of potatoes. There was so much dirt in the air I couldn't see Bud only a few feet in front of me. . . . The newspapers report that on May 10 . . . [an] estimated 12,000,000 tons of Plains soil was dumped on [Chicago].

May 30, 1934 [returning home after a week away]. The mess was incredible! Dirt had blown into the house all week and lay inches deep on everything. Every towel and curtain was just black. There wasn't a clean dish or cooking utensil. . . . The cupboards had to be washed out to have a clean place to put them. . . . [E]very towel, curtain, piece of bedding, and garment had to be taken outdoors to have as much dust as possible shaken out before washing. The cistern is dry, so I had to carry all the water we needed from the well. . . . That evening Cap [her boyfriend] came to take me to the movie, as usual. Ixnay [No]. I'm sorry I snapped at Cap. It isn't his fault, or anyone's fault, but I was tired and cross. Life in what the newspapers call "the Dust Bowl" is becoming a gritty nightmare.

July 9, 1934 [After a movie, Ann and Cap talk of marriage, but the discussion soon turns to their bleak economic prospects.] [Cap] is really a handsome man, . . . [but] suddenly I seemed to see what his face will be someday—a tombstone on which is written an epitaph of dead dreams. I shivered. [Cap said] "Oh sweetheart, you are cold. . . . I'll take you home." I didn't tell him I wasn't shivering from cold.

August 1, 1934. As far as one can see are brown pastures and fields which, in the wind, just rise up and fill the air with dirt. It tortures animals and humans, makes housekeeping an everlasting drudgery, and ruins machinery. The crops are long since ruined. . . . [A]ll subsoil moisture is gone. Fifteen feet down the ground is dry as dust. Trees are dying by the thousands. Cattle and horses are dying, some from starvation and some from dirt they eat on the grass.

July 11, 1936. Yesterday was 110° with a hot wind blowing. Today is the same. I'm writing this lying on the living room floor, dripping sweat and watching the dirt drift in the windows and across the floor. I've dusted this whole house twice today and won't do it again.

August 1, 1936. This is the worst summer yet. The fields are nothing but grasshoppers and dried-up Russian thistle. . . . There is one dust storm after another. It is the most disheartening situation I have seen yet. Livestock and humans are really suffering. I don't know how we keep going. . . .

Source: *From Dust Bowl Diary by Ann Marie Low by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright 1984 by the University of Nebraska Press.*

QUESTIONS

1. Along with their economic toll, what does this diary reveal about the dust storms' emotional and psychological impact?
2. What was Ann's basic source of information for events outside her immediate community?



Go to the website at www.cengage.com/history/boyerending7e for additional primary sources on this period.

Demagogues peddled various nostrums. The Detroit Catholic priest and radio spellbinder Charles Coughlin viciously attacked FDR, made anti-Semitic allusions, and called for nationalization of the banks. For a time, Coughlin's National Union of Social Justice, attracted considerable support, mainly from the lower middle class.

Meanwhile, California doctor Francis Townsend proposed that the government pay all retired citizens two hundred dollars a month, requiring them to spend it within thirty days. This plan, Townsend insisted, would help the elderly, stimulate the economy, and create jobs by encouraging retirement. The scheme would have bankrupted the nation, but many older citizens rallied to Townsend's banner.

FDR's wildest rival was Huey Long of Louisiana. A country lawyer elected governor in 1928, Long built highways, schools, and public housing while tolerating graft and political corruption. He roared into Washington as a senator in 1933, preaching his "Share Our Wealth" program: a 100 percent tax on all income over \$1 million and appropriation of all fortunes over \$5 million. Once this money was redistributed, Long promised, every family could enjoy a comfortable income. By 1935, he boasted 7.5 million supporters. His 1935 book, *My First Days in the White House*, made clear his ultimate goal. Long was assassinated that September, but his organization survived.

Battling back, Roosevelt regained the political high ground in 1935 with a fresh surge of legislation that rivaled that of the Hundred Days.

The New Deal Changes Course, 1935–1936

As the 1936 election neared, Roosevelt shelved the unity theme and championed the poor and the working class. His 1935 State of the Union address outlined six initiatives: expanded public-works programs, assistance to the rural poor, support for organized labor, benefits for retired workers and other at-risk groups, tougher business regulation, and heavier taxes on the well-to-do. These priorities translated into a bundle of reform measures some called "the Second New Deal" (see Table 24.2). FDR's landslide victory in 1936 solidified a new Democratic coalition. The New Deal also addressed environmental issues and launched public-works and power projects that stimulated economic development in the American West.

Expanding Federal Relief

With unemployment still high, Congress passed the \$5 billion Emergency Relief Appropriation Act in April 1935. Roosevelt swiftly set up the **Works Progress Administration** (WPA) under Harry

Hopkins to funnel assistance directly to the jobless. Roosevelt insisted that the WPA provide work, not handouts. Over its eight-year life, the WPA employed more than 8 million Americans and constructed or improved vast numbers of bridges, roads, post offices, and other public facilities.

The WPA also assisted writers, performers, and artists. The Federal Writers' Project (FWP) employed jobless writers nationwide to produce state and city guides and histories of ethnic and immigrant groups. In the South, research teams recorded the reminiscences of former slaves. Sterling Brown, the FWP's "Negro Affairs editor," worked to include African-American history and voices in FWP publications.

Under the WPA's Federal Music Project, unemployed musicians gave free concerts, often featuring American composers. Artists working for the Federal Arts Project designed posters, offered courses, and painted murals on public buildings.

The Federal Theatre Project (FTP) employed actors. One FTP project, the Living Newspaper, which dramatized current social issues, was criticized as New Deal propaganda. Nervous WPA officials canceled one FTP production, Marc Blitzstein's radical musical *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937), before the opening-night performance. The cast and audience defiantly walked to another theater, and the show went on.

Another 1935 agency, the National Youth Administration (NYA), provided job training for unemployed youth and part-time work for needy college students. Eleanor Roosevelt, viewing young people as the hope of the future, took particular pride in the NYA.

Harold Ickes's Public Works Administration, after a slow start, eventually completed some thirty-four thousand major construction projects, from New York City's Lincoln Tunnel to the awesome Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River. The PWA employed thousands of jobless workers.

All this relief spending generated large federal budget deficits, cresting at \$4.4 billion in 1936. According to British economist John Maynard Keynes, governments should deliberately use deficit spending during depressions to fund public-works programs, thereby increasing purchasing power and stimulating recovery. The New Deal approach, however, was not Keynesian. Because every dollar spent on relief programs was counterbalanced by taxation or government borrowing, the stimulus effect was nil. FDR saw deficits as an unwelcome necessity, not a positive good.

The New Deal's second phase more frankly targeted workers, the poor, and the disadvantaged. Social-justice advocates like Frances Perkins and Eleanor Roosevelt encouraged this class-based

TABLE 24.2 MAJOR LATER NEW DEAL LEGISLATION (NOVEMBER 1933–1938)

Nov. 1933	Civilian Works Administration Short-term relief program, created public-works employment for the jobless during the winter of 1933–1934.
1934	Civil Works Emergency Relief Act Temporary public-works program, replaced by Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935. Securities Exchange Act Created Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to regulate stock trading activities. National Housing Act Created Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to insure loans by private lending agencies for upgrading farms and small businesses. Indian Reorganization Act Halted sale of tribal lands and enabled tribes to regain unallocated lands.
1935	Emergency Relief Appropriations Act Created Works Progress Administration (WPA) to provide public-works jobs for the unemployed. National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) Guaranteed unions' collective-bargaining rights and outlawed anti-union practices. National Youth Administration Provided job training for 16- to 25-year-olds, and part-time jobs for high-school and college students. Revenue Act of 1935 (Wealth Tax Act) Raised taxes on corporations and the wealthy. Social Security Act Launched a federal-state program of workers' pensions, unemployment insurance, and other welfare benefits. Public Utilities Holding Company Act Restricted gas and electric companies to one geographic region. Rural Electrification Act Provided for low-cost loans to utility companies and cooperatives to spread electric power to rural America.
1937	Farm Tenancy Act Created Farm Security Administration (FSA) to aid small farmers and tenant farmers. Replaced 1935 Resettlement Administration.
1938	Fair Labor Standards Act Banned child labor and set a national minimum wage.

emphasis, but so did political calculations. Looking to 1936, FDR's political advisers feared that the followers of Coughlin, Townsend, and Long could siphon off enough votes to cost him the election. This worry underlay FDR's 1935 political agenda.

The Second New Deal's agricultural policy addressed the plight of sharecroppers (a plight the AAA had helped create) and other poor farmers. The Resettlement Administration (1935) made loans to help tenant farmers buy their own farms and to enable displaced sharecroppers, tenants, and dust-bowl migrants to move to more productive areas.

The Resettlement Administration also funded two documentary films directed by Pare Lorenz. *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) explained the farming practices that led to the dust bowl. *The River* (1938) dealt with the devastating effects of Mississippi River flooding, and the promise of New Deal flood-control projects. Lorenz's films rank among the outstanding cultural productions of the 1930s.

The Rural Electrification Administration, also started in 1935, made low-interest loans to utility companies and farmers' cooperatives to extend electricity to the 90 percent of rural America that



A FEDERAL MUSIC PROJECT EVENT IN NEW YORK'S CENTRAL PARK. Musicians employed by the New Deal's Federal Music Project (FMP) taught classes in addition to giving concerts. These young singers were participating in a children's music festival sponsored by the FMP. (*National Archives*)

still lacked it. By 1941, 40 percent of U.S. farms enjoyed electric power.

The agricultural-recovery program suffered a setback in January 1936 when the Supreme Court declared the Agricultural Adjustment Act unconstitutional. The processing tax that funded the AAA's subsidies, the Court held, was an illegal use of the government's tax power. To replace the AAA, Congress passed a soil-conservation act that paid farmers to plant grasses and legumes instead of soil-depleting crops such as wheat and cotton (which also happened to be the major surplus commodities).

Organized labor won a key victory in 1935, thanks to Senator Robert Wagner. During the New Deal's national-unity phase, FDR had criticized Wagner's campaign for a prolabor law as "special interest" legislation. But in 1935, when the Supreme Court outlawed the NIRA, including Section 7a protecting union members' rights, as unconstitutional, FDR called for a labor law that would survive court scrutiny. The **National Labor Relations Act** of July 1935 (the Wagner Act) guaranteed collective-bargaining rights, permitted closed shops (in which all employees must join a union), and outlawed such management tactics as blacklisting union organizers. The law created the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to enforce the law and supervise shop elections. A wave of unionization soon followed (discussed later in this chapter).

The Second New Deal's more class-conscious thrust shaped other 1935 measures as well. The Banking Act strengthened the Federal Reserve Board's control over the nation's financial system. The Public Utilities Holding Company Act, targeting the sprawling public-utility empires of the 1920s, restricted gas and electric companies to one geographic region.

In 1935, too, Roosevelt called for steeper taxes on the rich to combat the "unjust concentration of wealth and economic power." Congress responded with a revenue act, also called the Wealth Tax Act, raising taxes on corporations and on the well-to-do. With its many loopholes, this law was not quite the "soak the rich" measure some believed, but it did express the Second New Deal's more radical spirit.

The Social Security Act of 1935; End of the Second New Deal

The **Social Security Act** of 1935 stands out for its long-range significance. Drafted by a committee chaired by Frances Perkins, this measure drew upon Progressive Era ideas and European social-welfare programs. It established a mixed federal-state system of workers' pensions; unemployment insurance; survivors' benefits for victims of industrial accidents; and aid for disabled persons and dependent mothers with children.

Taxes paid partly by employers and partly by workers (in the form of sums withheld from their paychecks) helped fund the program. This cut in take-home pay contributed to a recession in 1937. But it made sense politically because workers would resist any threat to a pension plan they had contributed to. As FDR put it, “With those taxes in there, no damned politician can ever scrap my social security program.”

The initial Social Security Act paid low benefits and bypassed farmers, domestic workers, and the self-employed. But it established the principle of federal responsibility for social welfare and laid the foundation for vastly expanded future welfare programs.

As 1935 ended, the Second New Deal was complete. Without embracing the panaceas of demagogues, FDR had addressed the grievances they had exploited. Although conservatives called the Second New Deal “anti-business,” FDR insisted that he had saved capitalism through prudent reform. In earlier eras, the business class had dominated government, marginalizing other groups. Business interests remained influential in the 1930s, but the evolving New Deal also responded to other organized interest groups, including labor. And in 1935, with an election looming, New Deal strategists reached farther still, crafting legislation to aid sharecroppers, migrant workers, the disabled, the elderly, and others largely ignored by politicians of the past.

In the process, the New Deal enlarged the government’s role in American life, as well as the power of the presidency. Building on precedents set by Theodore Roosevelt, FDR so dominated 1930s’ politics that Americans now expected presidents to offer programs, address national issues, and shape the public debate. This decisively altered the power balance between the White House and Congress. Along with specific programs, the New Deal’s importance thus also lay in how it enlarged the scope of the presidency and the social role of the state.

The 1936 Roosevelt Landslide and the New Democratic Coalition

FDR confidently faced the 1936 campaign. “There’s one issue,” he told an aide; “it’s myself, and people must be either for me or against me.”

The Republican candidate, Kansas governor Alfred Landon, a moderate fiscal conservative,

proved an inept campaigner. (“Wherever I have gone in this country, I have found Americans,” he revealed in one speech.) FDR, by contrast, responded zestfully when Republicans lambasted his alleged dictatorial ambitions or charged that the social security law would

require all workers to wear metal dog tags. The forces of “selfishness and greed . . . are united in their hatred for me,” he declared at a tumultuous election-eve rally in New York City, “and I welcome their hatred.”

In the greatest landslide since 1820, FDR carried every state but Maine and Vermont (see Table 24.3). Landon even lost Kansas. Pennsylvania went Democratic for the first time since 1856. The Democrats increased their majorities in Congress. Socialist Norman Thomas received under 200,000 votes, the Communist Party’s presidential candidate only about 80,000. The Union Party, a coalition of Coughlinites, Townsendites, and Huey Long supporters, seemingly so formidable in 1935, polled under 900,000 votes.

The 1936 election signaled the emergence of a new Democratic coalition. Since Reconstruction, the Democrats had enjoyed three bases of support: the white South, parts of the West, and urban white ethnic voters. FDR retained these centers of strength. He rarely challenged state or local party leaders who produced the votes, whether or not they supported the New Deal.

Building on Al Smith’s urban gains in 1928, FDR carried the nation’s twelve largest cities in 1936. Aided by New Deal relief programs, many city-dwellers idolized Roosevelt. Cheering throngs greeted his visits to New York, Boston, or other cities. In filling New Deal positions, FDR often turned to the newer urban-immigrant groups, including Catholics and Jews.

Expanding the Democratic base, FDR also courted farmers and union members. Republican Midwestern farmers, won over by the New Deal’s agricultural program, voted accordingly. FDR decisively carried Iowa, a GOP bastion, in 1936. Union members, too, joined the Roosevelt bandwagon that year, and unions pumped money into Roosevelt’s campaign chest (though far less than business gave the Republicans). Despite his early criticism of the

“With those taxes in there, no damned politician can ever scrap my social security program.”

TABLE 24.3 THE ELECTION OF 1936

Candidate	Party	Electoral Vote	Popular Vote	Percentage of Popular Vote
Franklin D. Roosevelt	Democratic	523	27,752,869	60.8
Alfred M. Landon	Republican	8	16,674,665	36.5
William Lemke	Union	—	882,479	1.9



MARIAN ANDERSON AT THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL, PAINTING BY BETSY GRAVES REYNEAU In the 1950s, Reyneau did a series of paintings of notable black Americans for a touring exhibit. This painting portrays Marian Anderson at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday, 1939, where her concert drew an audience of 75,000 and was broadcast nationally. Eleanor Roosevelt and Harold Ickes arranged the event after the Daughters of the American Revolution denied the use of Constitution Hall. (*National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Museum, Washington, D.C./Art Resource, NY*)

Wagner bill, FDR's reputation as a "friend of labor" proved unassailable.

African Americans came aboard as well. Although most southern blacks remained disfranchised, northern blacks could vote, and as late as 1932, two-thirds of them voted Republican, the party of Lincoln. The New Deal caused a historic shift. In 1936, 76 percent of black voters supported FDR.

Economically, this shift made sense. New Deal relief programs greatly aided blacks. On racial-justice issues, however, the New Deal's record was mixed at best. Some NRA codes included racially discriminatory clauses, causing black activists to

deride the agency as "Negroes Ruined Again." TVA and other New Deal agencies tolerated racial bias. Lynchings increased in the 1930s as some whites translated economic worries into racial violence, but Roosevelt kept aloof from an NAACP campaign to make lynching a federal crime. When southern Democratic senators killed such a bill in 1935, FDR, concerned about other legislative initiatives, did little. "[T]he Roosevelt administration [has] nothing for [blacks]," the NAACP concluded bitterly.

In limited ways, FDR did address racial issues. He cautiously tried to rid New Deal agencies of blatant racism. He appointed more than a hundred blacks to policy-level and judicial positions, including Eleanor Roosevelt's friend Mary McLeod Bethune as director of minority affairs in the National Youth Administration. Bethune, a Florida educator, led the so-called black cabinet that linked the administration and black organizations. Roosevelt's Supreme Court appointees opposed racial discrimination in cases involving housing, voting rights, and other issues.

The New Deal also supported racial justice in symbolic ways. In 1938, when the participants in a conference in Birmingham, Alabama, were segregated in compliance with local statutes, Mrs. Roosevelt placed her chair halfway between the white and black delegates. In 1939, when the Daughters of the American Revolution barred black contralto Marian Anderson from performing in Washington's Constitution Hall, Mrs. Roosevelt and Harold Ickes arranged an Easter concert by Anderson at the Lincoln Memorial. Even symbolic gestures outraged many southern whites. When a black minister delivered the invocation at the 1936 Democratic convention, a South Carolina senator noisily stalked out.

Led by Molly Dewson, head of the Democratic Party's women's division, the New Deal also courted women voters. In the 1936 campaign, fifteen thousand women volunteers distributed flyers describing New Deal programs. "[W]e did not make the old-fashioned plea that our nominee was charming," she recalled; "We appealed to [women's] intelligence."

Dewson did not promote a specifically feminist agenda. The New Deal's economic programs, she argued, benefited both sexes. FDR did, however, appoint the first woman cabinet member, the first woman ambassador, and a number of female federal judges. Through Dewson's efforts, the 1936 Democratic platform committee reflected a fifty-fifty gender balance.

Despite the New Deal's symbolic gestures and appointment of a few blacks and women, racial and gender discrimination pervaded U.S. society in the 1930s, and Roosevelt, grappling with the depression, did relatively little to change things. That challenge would await a later time.

The Environment and the West

Environmental issues loomed large in the New Deal. While still in the New York Senate, FDR had sought logging regulation to protect wildlife. As president, he strongly supported the Civilian Conservation Corps' program of planting trees, thinning forests, and building hiking trails.

Soil conservation had high priority. The 1930s' dust storms resulted not only from drought, but from overgrazing and poor farming practices. For decades, Great Plains' wheat farmers had used tractors, combines, and heavy-duty plows called "sodbusters" to uproot the native prairie grasses that anchored the soil. When the rains failed, as they do in this drought-prone region, little remained to hold the soil in place, and parching winds whipped up devastating dust storms. By the 1930s, 9 million acres of farmland had been lost to erosion in the Great Plains, the South, and elsewhere.

In response, the Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service promoted contour plowing, crop rotation, and soil-strengthening grasses. The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 restricted the grazing on public lands that had exacerbated the problem. TVA dams helped control the floods that worsened erosion in the Tennessee valley.

New Deal planners also promoted national-park development, including Olympic National Park in Washington, Virginia's Shenandoah National Park, and Kings Canyon National Park in California. The administration also created some 160 new national wildlife refuges. FDR even closed a Utah artillery range near a nesting site of the endangered trumpeter swan!

The wilderness-preservation movement gained momentum in the 1930s, supported by such groups as the Wilderness Society (1935), started by environmentalist Aldo Leopold and others, and the National Wildlife Federation (1936), funded by firearms makers eager to preserve hunting areas. Pressured by such groups, Congress began to set aside protected wilderness areas. Building on these beginnings, the United States by 2008 had 704 officially designated national wilderness areas, comprising 107 million acres.

By later standards, the New Deal's environmental record was spotty. The decade's massive hydroelectric projects, while providing rural families with electricity, had serious ecological consequences. The Grand Coulee Dam, for example, destroyed salmon spawning on much of the Columbia River's tributary system. Other dams disrupted fragile ecosystems and the livelihoods of local residents, particularly Native American communities, who depended on them.

Viewed in context, however, the New Deal's environmental record remains impressive. While coping

with the depression, the Roosevelt administration also focused a level of attention on environmental issues that had not been seen since the Progressive Era, and would not be seen again for a generation.

The New Deal impact on the West was profound, especially because the federal government owned a third or more of the land in eleven western states, and much more in some states. New Deal agencies and laws such as the Soil Conservation Service, the Taylor Grazing Act, and the Farm Security Administration (discussed shortly) set new rules for western agriculture, from prairie wheat fields and cattle ranges to California citrus groves and truck farms dependent on migrant labor.

The PWA and WPA built many large projects in the West, including thousands of public buildings, from courthouses and post offices to tourist facilities such as beautiful Timberline Lodge on Oregon's Mount Hood. Federal assistance also upgraded the highways linking the West to the rest of America, such as Route 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles.

Above all, the PWA in the West built dams—not only Grand Coulee, but also Shasta on the Sacramento River, Bonneville on the Columbia, Glen Canyon on the Colorado, and others. The PWA completed Hoover Dam on the Colorado, authorized by Congress in 1928 (see Chapter 23), well ahead of schedule. Despite their ecological downside, these great undertakings—among the largest engineering projects in history—supplied electricity to vast regions while contributing to flood control, irrigation, and soil conservation. (Las Vegas owed its post-World War II emergence as a gambling and entertainment mecca to power from nearby Hoover Dam.)

A New Deal initiative especially important for the West was Harold Ickes's National Planning Board, later renamed the National Resources Planning Board. This agency, which extended Herbert Hoover's promotion of multi-state water-resource planning in the West, facilitated state and regional management of water, soil, timber, and minerals.

The New Deal's End Stage, 1937–1939

Buoyed by his 1936 victory, Roosevelt proposed a controversial restructuring of the Supreme Court. After losing this fight, FDR confronted a stubborn recession and resurgent conservative opposition. With a few measures in 1937–1938, the New Deal ended.

FDR and the Supreme Court

In 1937, four of the Supreme Court's nine elderly justices were archconservatives who abhorred the

New Deal. Joined by more moderate colleagues, these conservatives had struck down the NRA, the AAA, and progressive state laws. Roosevelt feared that the Social Security Act, the Wagner Act, and other key measures would meet a similar fate. Indeed, some corporate lawyers, convinced that the Social Security Act would be ruled unconstitutional, advised their clients to ignore it.

In February 1937, FDR proposed a bill that would have allowed him to appoint an additional Supreme Court member for each justice over age seventy, up to a total of six. Roosevelt blandly insisted that this would ease aging justices' heavy workload, but his political motivation was obvious.

Despite FDR's popularity, the press and public reacted with hostility. The Supreme Court's size, although unspecified in the Constitution, had held steady at nine since 1869, and thus seemed almost sacrosanct. Conservatives blasted FDR's "court-packing" scheme as a dangerous power grab. Even many Democrats disapproved. When the Senate voted down the scheme in July, FDR quietly dropped it.

But was this a defeat? Roosevelt's challenge to the Court, plus his 1936 electoral victory, sent powerful political signals that the justices heeded. In spring 1937, the Court upheld several New Deal measures, including the Wagner Act and a state minimum-wage law. Four conservative justices soon retired, enabling FDR to nominate successors of his choice and to create a judicial legacy that would long endure.

Overall, the New Deal era saw a fundamental shift in the Supreme Court's constitutional views. For decades, the court had interpreted very narrowly the Constitution's Commerce Clause (Article I, Sec. 8), which empowers the government to regulate business. After the 1930s, the court interpreted the Commerce Clause more broadly and proved much more receptive to business regulation and to the protection of individual rights as well as property rights.

The Roosevelt Recession

After a partial recovery, the economy dipped ominously in August 1937. Industrial production slumped. Unemployment again dominated the headlines. Federal policies that reduced consumer income contributed to this "Roosevelt recession." Social-security payroll taxes withdrew some \$2 billion from circulation. The Federal Reserve Board had raised interest rates to forestall inflation, further contracting the money supply. FDR, meanwhile, concerned about mounting deficits,

had cut back the New Deal relief programs.

Echoing Hoover, FDR assured his cabinet, "Everything will work out...if we just sit tight." Meanwhile, however,

some advisors had embraced John Maynard Keynes's advocacy of deficit spending as the key to recovery. Aware that political rather than economic arguments carried more weight with FDR, they warned of a political backlash if conditions worsened. Convinced, FDR in April 1938 authorized new relief spending. By late 1938, unemployment had declined and industrial output increased. As late as 1939, however, more than 17 percent of the labor force remained jobless.

Final Measures; Growing Opposition

Preoccupied by the Supreme Court fight, the recession, and events abroad (covered in Chapter 25), FDR offered few domestic initiatives after 1936. Congress, however, enacted several significant measures.

In 1937, Congress created the **Farm Security Administration** (FSA), replacing the under-funded Resettlement Administration. The FSA made low-interest loans to help tenant farmers and sharecroppers become farm owners. However, the FSA often rejected the poorest farmers' loan applications as too risky, weakening the program's impact.

The FSA operated camps offering shelter and medical services to impoverished migrant farm workers. FSA nurses and home economists provided practical advice on hygiene and housekeeping to poor farm families. The FSA also commissioned photographers to record the lives of migrant workers, tenant farmers, and dust-bowl refugees. These FSA photographs, published in various periodicals, helped shape a gritty documentary style that pervaded 1930s' popular culture, including movies and Henry Luce's photo magazine *Life*, launched in 1936. Today they comprise a haunting album of depression-era images.

Other measures set precedents for the future. The 1937 Housing Act appropriated \$500 million for slum-clearance and public-housing projects that would vastly expand in the 1950s. The **Fair Labor Standards Act** of 1938 banned child labor and set a national minimum wage (initially forty cents an hour) and a maximum workweek of forty hours. This measure reflected not only humanitarianism but also some northern legislators' desire to undermine the competitive edge of the low-wage South. Despite many loopholes, the law helped exploited workers and underscored the government's role in regulating abusive workplace conditions.

In a final stab at raising farm income, the 1938 Agricultural Adjustment Act created a mechanism by which the government, in years of big harvests and low prices, would make loans to farmers and warehouse their surplus crops. When prices rose, farmers could sell these commodities and repay their loans. This complicated system set the framework of federal farm price support for decades.

"Everything will work out...if we just sit tight."



A CAMERA'S-EYE VIEW OF DEPRESSION-ERA AMERICA This 1937 image by Dorothea Lange, a photographer with the Farm Security Administration, pictures migrants from the Texas dust bowl gathered at a roadside camp near Calipatria in southern California. (*Library of Congress*)

Overall, New Deal farm policy produced mixed results. Large-scale growers benefited from government payments, but the cumbersome price-support mechanisms created many problems. The FSA assisted some tenants, sharecroppers, and small farmers (though often not the neediest), but did little to slow the long-term decline of family farms and the rise of agribusinesses. In reality, many small farmers dreamed of becoming large-scale commercial operators. Most did not succeed, however, and gradually left the land.

The New Deal's slower pace after 1935 also reflected the rise of an anti-New Deal congressional coalition of Republicans and conservative southern Democrats. In 1937, this coalition rejected FDR's proposal to reorganize the executive branch. The plan made administrative sense, but critics again warned darkly of FDR's dictatorial ambitions.

In 1938–1939, conservative legislators slashed relief appropriations, cut corporate taxes, and killed the WPA's Federal Theatre Project for its alleged radicalism. Meanwhile, the House Un-American Activities Committee (created in 1937) investigated New Deal agencies for communist infiltration. The 1939 Hatch Act, barring federal employees from electoral campaigning,

reflected conservatives' suspicions that WPA staff members were doubling as campaign workers. Indeed, Harry Hopkins and other public-works officials well understood these programs' electoral value, and political calculations influenced the allocation of PWA and WPA funds.

Although FDR campaigned in the 1938 midterm elections, the Republicans gained in the House and Senate and won a net of thirteen governorships. In the Democratic primaries Roosevelt opposed several anti-New Deal Democratic senators, but most defeated their primary challengers and went on to win in November. Highlighting foreign affairs in his January 1939 State of the Union message, FDR proposed no new domestic measures and merely noted the need to "preserve our reforms." The New Deal was over.

Social Change and Social Action in the 1930s

American life in the 1930s involved more than politics. The depression affected everyone, including the jobless and their families; working women;

and all age groups. For industrial workers, African-Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, the crisis brought hard times but also encouraged organized resistance to exploitation and brought new legislative initiatives.

The Depression's Psychological and Social Impact

The depression marked all who lived through it. Despite the New Deal, unemployment never fell below about 14 percent in the 1930s and was often considerably higher. A quarter of all farm families sought public or private assistance during the 1930s. Even the employed often had to take jobs below their level of training: college alumni pumped gas; business-school graduates sold furniture; a retired navy captain became a movie theater usher.

Psychologists described “unemployment shock”: jobless persons who walked the streets seeking work and then lay awake at night worrying. When shoe soles wore out, cardboard or folded newspapers had to serve. Advertisements for mouthwashes, deodorants, and correspondence courses exploited feelings of shame and failure. Women’s magazines described low-cost meals and other budget-trimming strategies. Habits of scrimping and saving acquired in the 1930s often survived into more affluent times. As Caroline Bird wrote in *The Invisible Scar* (1966), a social history of the 1930s, the depression for many

boiled down to “a dull misery in the bones.”

New York senator Robert Wagner called the working woman in the depression “the first orphan in the storm.” Indeed, for the 25 percent of U.S. women employed in 1930, the depression brought

difficult times. The female jobless rate exceeded 20 percent for much of the decade. Working women often took lower-paying jobs. Laid-off factory workers became waitresses. Jobless men competed with women even for such traditional “women’s work” as library posts and school teaching.

Married women workers endured harsh criticism. Although most worked because of economic necessity, critics accused them of stealing men’s jobs. Even Labor Secretary Frances Perkins urged married women to leave the labor market so more men could work. School boards fired married women teachers.

Women workers faced wage discrimination. In 1939, women teachers earned nearly 20 percent less than male teachers with comparable experience. Some NRA codes authorized lower pay for women. The minimum-wage provision of the Fair

Labor Standards Act did not include the more than 2 million women who worked for wages in private households.

The late 1930s’ unionization drive had mixed effects on women workers. Women employed in mass-production industries benefited, but the heavily female sectors of the labor force—textiles, sales, clerical and service work—resisted unionization. Male managers and even male union leaders opposed a campaign to unionize female clerical workers.

Despite the criticism, the percentage of married women in the workforce increased in the 1930s from under 12 percent to nearly 16 percent. The depression may actually have hastened the long-term movement of women into the workplace as married women took jobs out of necessity. When her husband stopped looking for work in 1932, one working wife explained, “[At] twenty-eight, with two little girls, . . . I took a job as a salesclerk . . . , and worked through the Depression.”

As this story suggests, the depression affected family life. The birthrate fell in the early thirties as married couples postponed a family, and as birth-control devices became more readily available. The U.S. population in the 1930s grew by only 7 percent, in contrast to an average of 20 percent per decade from 1900 to 1930.

Family survival posed major challenges. Parents patched clothes, stretched food resources, and sought public assistance when necessary. In homes with a tradition of strong male authority, the husband’s loss of a job could prove devastating. “I would rather turn on the gas and put an end to the whole family than let my wife support me,” one man told a social investigator. Desertions increased, and the divorce rate spiked, hitting a then all-time high by 1940.

The depression spared neither old nor young. Bank failures wiped out the savings of older Americans. By 1935, a million citizens over sixty-five were on relief. One observer compared young people to runners waiting for a starting gun that never sounded. High-school enrollment increased as many youths, lacking job prospects, stayed in school. The marriage rate declined as anxious young people postponed this step. Commented Eleanor Roosevelt in 1934, “I have moments of real terror when I think we might be losing this generation.”

Children found vacation plans canceled, birthdays with few presents, and mealtimes tense with anxious discussions. Depression-era children wrote sad letters to Eleanor Roosevelt. A Michigan high-school senior described her shame at lacking a graduation dress. “I give all I earn for food for the family,” she explained. A thirteen-year-old Arkansas girl wrote, “I have to stay out of school because I have no books or clothes to ware.”

The depression for many boiled down to “a dull misery in the bones.”

Rediscovering traditional skills, depression-era families canned fruit and vegetables, painted their houses, and repaired their own cars. Many would later recall the 1930s as a time of simple, inexpensive pleasures and neighborly sharing of scant resources.

For the neediest—among them blacks, Hispanics, and southern sharecroppers—the depression imposed added misery on poverty-blighted lives. In *Native Son* (1940), novelist Richard Wright portrayed the desperate conditions in Chicago’s black slums. Yet hope survived. Emotional resilience, habits of mutual aid, and survival skills honed over the years helped poor families cope. In New York’s Harlem, a charismatic black religious leader calling himself Father Divine institutionalized this cooperative spirit by organizing kitchens that distributed free meals to the needy.

Industrial Workers Unionize

Of America’s 7.7 million factory workers in 1930, most remained unorganized. Major industries such as steel, automobiles, and textiles had resisted workers’ attempts to unionize. The conservative mood of the 1920s had further weakened the labor movement.

But with hard times and a favorable government climate, labor militancy surged in the 1930s. The Wagner Act’s guarantee of workers’ right to organize jolted the U.S. labor movement. The nation’s major labor organization, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), had historically organized unions of skilled craftsmen rather than of all workers in a given industry (see Chapter 18). In the 1930s, that pattern changed. In November 1935, John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers and Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, frustrated by the AFL’s slowness in organizing factory workers, started the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) within the AFL. CIO activists preached unionization in Pittsburgh steel mills, Detroit auto plants, Akron rubber factories, and southern textile mills. Unlike the narrowly restrictive AFL unions, CIO unions welcomed all workers in a particular industry, regardless of race, gender, or skill level.

In 1936 a CIO-sponsored organizing committee announced a strike to unionize the steel industry. (In fact, John L. Lewis had already secretly negotiated a settlement with the head of U.S. Steel.) In March 1937, U.S. Steel recognized the union, raised wages, and introduced a forty-hour workweek. Other big steel companies followed suit, and soon four hundred thousand steelworkers were union members (see Figure 24.4).

Other CIO organizers targeted General Motors, an anti-union stronghold. Their leader was a redheaded

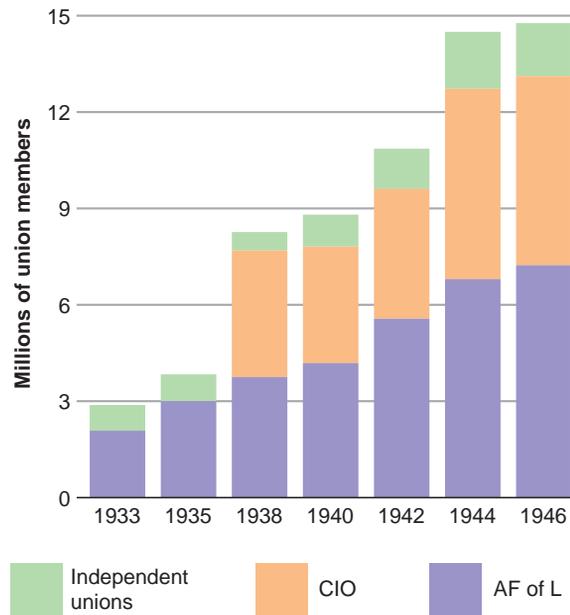


FIGURE 24.4 THE GROWTH OF LABOR UNION MEMBERSHIP, 1933–1946 The CIO’s industrial unions grew rapidly with passage of the pro-union National Labor Relations Act in 1935. Union membership increased still more as war plants hired workers in the early 1940s.

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 (1975), 176–177.

young autoworker and labor activist, Walter Reuther. Reuther’s German-American father was a committed socialist, and when the depression hit, young Reuther rediscovered his radical roots. On December 30, 1936, employees at GM’s plants in Flint, Michigan, stopped work and peacefully occupied the factories. This “sit-down” strategy (adopted so GM could not hire strikebreakers to keep the plants operating) paralyzed GM’s production.

Although women workers did not participate in the plant occupation (to avoid gossip that might discredit the strike), they picketed outside. A Women’s Auxiliary led by strikers’ families provided meals, set up a speakers’ bureau, and organized marches.

GM sent spies to union meetings, called in police to harass the strikers, and threatened to fire them. A showdown with the police led to the formation of the Women’s Emergency Brigade, whose members remained on twenty-four-hour alert for picket duty or to surround the plants in case of police raids.

GM asked President Roosevelt and Michigan’s governor to send troops to expel the strikers, as Herbert Hoover had done with the bonus marchers. Both declined, however. Although the sit-down tactic troubled FDR, he refused to intervene.

On February 11, 1937, GM signed a contract recognizing the United Automobile Workers (UAW). Bearded workers who had vowed not to shave until victory was won streamed out of the plants. As Chrysler fell into line also, the UAW boasted more than four hundred thousand members. Unionization of the electrical and rubber industries advanced as well.

In 1938 the Committee for Industrial Organization broke with the AFL to become the **Congress of Industrial Organizations**, a 2-million-member association of industrial unions. In response, the AFL, too, began to adapt to the changed nature of the labor force. Overall, U.S.

union membership shot from under 3 million in 1933 to over 8 million in 1941.

Some big corporations resisted. Henry Ford hated unions, and his tough lieutenant Harry Bennett organized a squad of union-busting thugs to fight the UAW. In 1937 Bennett's men viciously beat Walter Reuther and other UAW officials outside Ford's plant near Detroit. Not until 1941 did Ford finally yield to the union's pressure.

The Republic Steel Company, headed by a union hater named Tom Girdler, dug in as well. Even after the major steelmakers signed with the CIO, Republic and other smaller companies known collectively as "Little Steel" resisted. In May 1937, workers in twenty-seven Little Steel plants, including Republic's factory in Chicago, walked off the job. Anticipating the strike, Girdler had assembled an

An investigative committee condemned the killings as "clearly avoidable."

arsenal of guns and tear gas. On May 30, Memorial Day, a group of strikers approached over 250 police guarding the factory. When someone threw a large stick at the police, they responded with gunfire that left four strikers dead and scores wounded. An investigative committee condemned the killings as "clearly avoidable." In 1941, under growing pressure, the Little Steel companies, including Republic, finally accepted the CIO union.

Another holdout was the textile industry, with over six hundred thousand low-paid workers, mostly in the South and 40 percent female. A unionizing effort in the 1920s had failed owing to mill owners' hostility (see Chapter 23). In 1934, the AFL-affiliated United Textile Workers launched a new drive. Some four hundred thousand textile workers went on strike, but again the mill owners fought back. Anti-union Southern governors mobilized the National Guard. Several strikers were killed and thousands arrested. The strike failed, and the textile industry remained mostly non-union as the decade ended.

Indeed, despite the unionization surge, more than three-quarters of the nonfarm labor force remained unorganized in 1940, including low-paid manual laborers; domestic workers; and employees in department stores, offices, restaurants, and laundries—categories that included many women, blacks, and recent immigrants. Nevertheless, the unionization of many industrial workers ranks among the decade's memorable developments.

Why did powerful corporations yield to unionization after years of resistance? Workers' militancy and union organizers' tactical skill were crucial. But so was a changed government climate. Historically, the government had helped corporations break strikes. Although this still happened in the 1930s, as in the textile-industry strike, the Roosevelt administration and state officials generally refused to play the role of strikebreaker. New Deal labor laws made clear that Washington would no longer automatically back management in labor disputes. Once corporate managers realized this, unionization often followed.

Organized labor's successes in the later 1930s concealed some complex tensions. A core of activists, including communists and socialists, led the unionizing drive. Most rank-and-file workers were not political radicals, but once the CIO's militant minority showed the effectiveness of picket lines and sit-down strikes, workers signed up by the thousands. As they did, the radical organizers lost influence, and the unions became more conservative.



LABOR ORGANIZING, 1930s-STYLE Walter Reuther (left) and Richard Frankensteen of the United Auto Workers, after their beating by Ford Motor Company security guards, Detroit, May 1937. (Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs/ Wayne State University)

Black and Hispanic Americans Resist Racism and Exploitation

The depression stirred activism within the African-American and Hispanic communities. Although

black migration northward slowed in the 1930s, four hundred thousand southern blacks moved to northern cities in the decade. By 1940, nearly one-quarter of America's 12 million blacks lived in the urban North.

Rural or urban, life was hard. Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers often faced eviction. Although some black industrial workers benefited from the CIO's nondiscriminatory policy, workplace racism remained a fact of life.

Over one hundred blacks died by lynching in the 1930s, and other miscarriages of justice continued, especially in the South. In 1931, an all-white jury in Scottsboro, Alabama, sentenced eight black youths to death on highly suspect rape charges. In 1935, after heavy publicity and an aggressive defense, the Supreme Court ordered a new trial for the "Scottsboro Boys" because they had been denied legal counsel and blacks had been excluded from the jury. Five of the group were again convicted, however, and served long prison terms.

But rising activism signaled changes ahead. The NAACP battled in courts and legislatures for voting rights and against lynching and segregation. Under the banner "Don't Shop Where You Can't Work," black protesters picketed businesses that refused to hire blacks, particularly in black neighborhoods. In

March 1935, hostility toward discriminatory white-owned businesses in Harlem, intensified by anger over racism and joblessness, ignited a riot that caused heavy property damage and left three dead.

The Communist Party publicized lynchings and racial discrimination, and supplied lawyers for the "Scottsboro Boys," as part of a depression-era recruitment effort in the black community. But despite a few notable recruits (including the novelist Richard Wright), few blacks joined the party.

Other groups also faced discrimination. California continued to restrict landownership by Japanese-Americans. In 1934, Congress limited annual immigration from the Philippines to fifty, and offered free travel "home" for Filipinos long settled in the United States.

The more than 2 million Hispanic Americans confronted difficulties as well. Some were citizens with ancestral roots in the Southwest, but most were recent arrivals from Mexico or Caribbean islands such as Cuba and Puerto Rico (a U.S. holding whose residents are American citizens). While the Caribbean immigrants settled in East Coast cities, most Mexican newcomers worked as migratory

"Don't Shop Where You Can't Work."

A CARAVAN OF PICKETERS DURING A 1933 STRIKE OF COTTON WORKERS IN CORCORAN, CALIFORNIA Protesting low wages and appalling working conditions, agricultural workers from Mexico went on strike across California's rich San Joaquin Valley in the early 1930s. In some cases, Communist Party members helped organize these strikes. (*Library of Congress*)



agricultural laborers in the Southwest and elsewhere, or in midwestern steel or meatpacking plants.

As the depression deepened, Mexican-born residents endured rising hostility. “Okies” fleeing the dust bowl competed for jobs with Hispanic farm workers. By 1937 over half of Arizona’s cotton workers were out-of-staters who had supplanted Mexican-born laborers. With their migratory work patterns disrupted, Mexican-Americans poured into the barrios (Hispanic neighborhoods) of southwestern cities. Lacking work, half a million returned to Mexico in the 1930s. Many did so voluntarily, but immigration officials and local authorities repatriated others. Los Angeles welfare officials announced free one-way transportation to Mexico. The savings in relief payments, they calculated, would more than offset the cost of sending *repatriados* to Mexico. Though the plan was “voluntary,” those who remained were denied relief payments or jobs with New Deal work programs. Under federal and local pressure, an estimated seventy thousand Mexicans left Los Angeles in 1931 alone.

Mexican-American farm workers who remained endured appalling conditions and near-starvation wages. A wave of strikes (some led by Communist organizers) swept California. A labor organization called the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (Confederation of Unions of Mexican Workers and Farm Laborers) emerged from a 1933 grape workers’ strike. More strikes erupted in 1935-1936 from the celery fields and citrus groves around Los Angeles to the lettuce fields of the Salinas Valley.

Organizations like the citrus-growers’ marketing cooperative Sunkist fought the unions, sometimes with violence. In October 1933, bullets ripped into a cotton pickers’ union hall in Pixley, California, killing two men and wounding others. Resisting intimidation, the strikers won a 20 percent pay increase. Striking cotton pickers and other Mexican-American farm workers gained hard-fought victories as well. These strikes awakened at least some Americans to the plight of one of the nation’s most exploited groups.

A New Deal for Native Americans

The 1930s also focused attention on the nation’s 330,000 Native Americans, most of whom endured poverty, scant education, and poor health care. The 1887 Dawes Act (see Chapter 17) had dissolved the tribes as legal entities, allocated some tribal lands to individual Indians, and offered the rest for sale. By the 1930s, non-Indians held about two-thirds of the land that Indians had possessed in 1887. Indians had gained voting rights in 1924, but this did little to improve their lot.

In 1923, the reformer John Collier, who had lived among New Mexico’s Pueblo Indians, founded the

American Indian Defense Association to reverse the Dawes Act approach and to revitalize traditional Indian life. The National Council of American Indians, headed by Gertrude Bonnin, a Yankton Dakota Sioux, also pressed for reform.

Appointed commissioner of Indian affairs in 1933, Collier gathered funds from various New Deal agencies to construct schools, hospitals, and irrigation systems on reservations, and to preserve sites of cultural importance. The Civilian Conservation Corps employed twelve thousand Indian youths on projects on Indian lands.

Pursuing his vision, Collier drafted a bill to halt tribal land sales and restore the remaining unallocated lands to tribal control. Collier’s bill also gave broad powers to tribal councils and required Indian schools to teach Native American history and handicrafts. Some Indian leaders criticized it as a plan to transform reservations into living museums and to isolate Native Americans from modern life. Some Indian property owners and entrepreneurs rejected the bill’s tribalist assumptions. The bill did, indeed, reflect the idealism of well-meaning outsiders rather than the views of the nation’s diverse Native American groups.

The **Indian Reorganization Act** of 1934, a compromise measure, halted tribal land sales and enabled tribes to regain title to unallocated lands. But Congress scaled back Collier’s proposals for tribal self-government and dropped his proposals for renewing traditional tribal culture.

Of 258 tribes that voted on the law (a requirement for it to go into effect), 181 favored it, while 77 did not. America’s largest tribal group, the 40,000-strong Navajo, voted no, largely because the law, to promote soil conservation, restricted grazing rights.

Indian policy remained contentious. But the law did recognize Indian interests and the value of cultural diversity. The restoration of tribes as legal entities laid the groundwork for later tribal business ventures as well as legal efforts to enforce long-ignored treaty rights (to be discussed in Chapter 30).

The American Cultural Scene in the 1930s

Radio and the movies offered escapist fare amid the hard times of the 1930s, though some films addressed depression-era realities. Novelists, artists, playwrights, and photographers tended toward a highly critical view of capitalist America when the depression first struck, as we have seen. As the decade went on, however, a more positive view of America emerged, reflecting both optimism about the New Deal and apprehension about events abroad.

Avenues of Escape: Radio and the Movies

The standardization of mass culture continued in the 1930s. Each evening, Americans turned to their radios for network news, musical programs, and comedy shows. Radio humor flourished as Americans battled hard times. Comedians like Jack Benny and the husband-and-wife team George Burns and Gracie Allen attracted millions.

So, too, did the fifteen-minute afternoon domestic dramas known as soap operas (for the soap companies that sponsored them). Despite their assembly-line quality, these programs won a devoted audience, consisting mostly of housewives. Identifying with the radio heroines's troubles, female listeners gained temporary escape from their own difficulties. As one put it, "I can get through the day better when I hear they have sorrows, too."

The movies, with their low-priced tickets, remained extremely popular. In 1939, 65 percent of Americans went to the movies at least once a week.

Films of the early 1930s like *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932) captured the grimness of the early depression. The popular Marx Brothers movies reflected the uncertainty of the Hoover years, when the economy and the social order itself seemed on the verge of collapse. In comedies like *Animal Crackers* (1930) and *Duck Soup* (1933), these vaudeville troupers of German-Jewish immigrant origins ridiculed authority and satirized the established order.

After Roosevelt took office, Warner Brothers studio (with close ties to the administration) made several topical films that presented the New Deal in a favorable light. These included *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933), about unemployed youth; *Massacre* (1934), on the mistreatment of Indians; and *Black Fury* (1935), dealing with striking coal miners.

Early thirties' gangster movies, inspired by real-life criminals like Al Capone, presented a different style of film realism. Films like *Little Caesar* (1930) and *The Public Enemy* (1931) offered gritty images of depression America: menacing streets; forbidding industrial sites; gunfights between rival gangs. (When civic groups protested the glorification of crime, Hollywood made the police and "G-men"—FBI agents—the heroes, while retaining the violence.) The movie gangsters played by Edward G. Robinson and James Cagney, variants of the Horatio Alger hero battling adversity, appealed to depression-era moviegoers.

Above all, Hollywood offered escape from depression-era realities. The publicist who claimed that the movies "literally laughed the big bad wolf of the depression out of the public mind" exaggerated, but cinema's escapist function in the 1930s is clear.

Musicals such as *Gold Diggers of 1933* (with its theme song, "We're in the Money") offered dancing, music, and cheerful plots involving the triumph of pluck over adversity. In Frank Capra's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*

(1936) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), virtuous heroes representing "the people" vanquish entrenched interests. When color movies arrived in the late 1930s (see Technology and Culture), they seemed an omen of better times ahead.

African-Americans appeared in 1930s' movies, if at all, mostly as stereotypes: the scatterbrained maid in *Gone with the Wind* (1939); the indulgent house servant played by tap dancer Bill Robinson and patronized by child star Shirley Temple in *The Little Colonel* (1935); the slow-witted "Stepin Fetchit" played in many movies by black actor Lincoln Perry.

In representing women, Hollywood offered mixed messages. While some 1930s' movie heroines found fulfillment in marriage and domesticity, other films challenged the stereotype. Joan Bennett played a strong-willed professional in *The Wedding Present* (1936). Katharine Hepburn portrayed independent-minded women in such films as *Spitfire* (1934) and *A Woman Rebels* (1936). Mae West, brassy and openly sexual, mocked conventional stereotypes in *I'm No Angel* (1933) and other 1930s hits.

The Later 1930s: Opposing Fascism; Reaffirming Traditional Values

The 1930s ended on a cautiously upbeat note. America had survived the depression. The social fabric remained whole; revolution had not come. As other societies collapsed into dictatorships, U.S. democracy endured. Writers, composers, and other cultural creators reflected the changed mood.

International developments and a domestic political movement known as the **Popular Front** influenced this shift. In the early 1930s, the U.S. Communist Party attacked Roosevelt and the New Deal. But in 1935, Russian dictator Joseph Stalin, fearing attack by Nazi Germany, called for a worldwide alliance, or Popular Front, against Adolf Hitler and his Italian fascist ally, Benito Mussolini. (Fascism is a form of government involving one-party rule, extreme nationalism, hostility to minority groups, and the suppression of dissent.) Parroting the new Soviet line, U.S. communists now praised FDR and summoned writers and intellectuals to the antifascist cause. Many noncommunists, alarmed by developments in Europe, responded.

The Spanish Civil War was the Popular Front's high-water mark. In July 1936, Spanish fascist

"I can get through the day better when I hear they have sorrows, too."



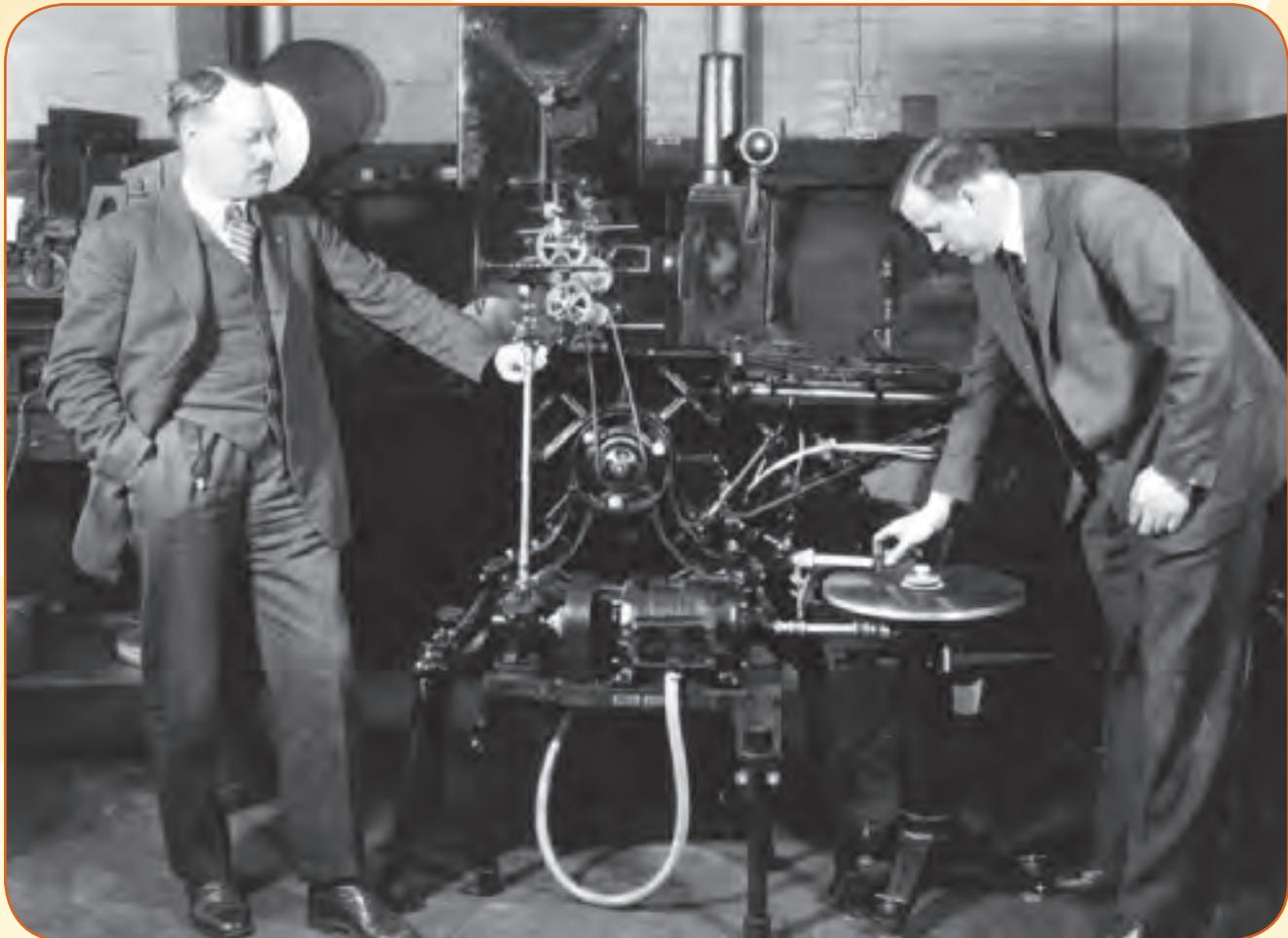
Sound, Color, and Animation Come to the Movies

Movies were a familiar part of the U.S. cultural landscape by the 1930s, but this decade brought technological advances that vastly increased their popularity. In 1920, movies were silent and black-and-white. By 1940, they had been transformed by sound, color, and animation.

From the earliest days of motion pictures, filmmakers had struggled to bring sound to the medium. Thomas Edison experimented with synchronizing phonograph recordings with the action on the screen. Warner Brothers, a new film studio in the 1920s, explored the commercial possibilities of this technology through a subsidiary company called Vitaphone. This method was complicated, and coordinating

sound with the moving image proved difficult. Nevertheless, the most famous early “sound” movie, Warner Brothers’ *The Jazz Singer* (1927) starring Al Jolson, used the Vitaphone technology. *The Jazz Singer* was actually a silent film with a few recorded songs and snatches of dialogue. But audiences sensed an important breakthrough and cheered when Jolson suddenly and prophetically declared: “Wait a minute, wait a minute. You ain’t heard nothin’ yet.” The first true sound film, Warner Brothers’ *Lights of New York* (1928), also used Vitaphone recordings.

Meanwhile, in 1900, an inventor had secured a patent for a different technology that involved adding a soundtrack to



THE VITAPHONE Technicians test the Vitaphone, an early machine for adding sound to movies by synchronizing disk recordings with filmed images. (Courtesy AT&T Archives and History Center)

the film itself by means of a photoelectric cell. Development lagged until 1923, when radio pioneer Lee DeForest invented a technique he called Phonofilm. Fox film studio acquired Phonofilm, rechristened it “Movietone,” and introduced sound films far superior to the Vitaphone system.

Movies of the 1930s burst into sound: spoken dialogue, orchestras in musical extravaganzas, squealing tires and explosive gunfire in gangster films. The Wurlitzer theater organs that had accompanied the silent movies gathered dust; stars of the silent era whose voices did not match their appearance faded. Ironically, the coming of sound initially made movies more stilted by forcing actors to stand motionless near microphones hidden in trees, lamps, and flower pots, but this problem was soon solved. Another unanticipated consequence was to slow the export of U.S. films to non-English-speaking countries.

Color came more slowly, even though experiments with tinting motion-picture film dated to the 1890s. In 1915 two Americans, Herbert Kalmus and Daniel Comstock, developed a more advanced system, which they called Technicolor. It involved a camera with two film tracks and two apertures, one with a red filter and the other with a blue filter. The two films were then bonded together in the production process. The first film made by this method was *Toll of the Sea* (1922).

The Technicolor company soon improved this primitive technology, developing a movie camera that could film the same scene simultaneously in the three primary colors, red, blue, and green, with the three films later combined into one. Two hit films of 1939, *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*, introduced color to the movie-going public. The latter had a particularly powerful effect because the opening scenes, set in Kansas, were black-and-white. When Dorothy awakens in Oz, the movie bursts into color.

Film animation, too, has a long history. *Gertie the Dinosaur*, an animated cartoon by Winsor McCay, a New York newspaper cartoonist, appeared in 1908. In the 1920s, movie bills included short cartoons featuring comic-strip characters such as Felix the Cat. The animation process was slow and labor-intensive, involving individual photographs of hundreds of drawings. A key breakthrough was “cel” animation, by which the moving parts could be sketched on celluloid sheets without redrawing the entire character.

The giant of movie animation was Walt Disney (1901–1966), a Chicago art student who moved to Los Angeles in 1923. Disney’s most famous animated character, Mickey Mouse, first appeared in *Plane Crazy* in May 1928 and made his sound debut later that year in *Steamboat Willie*. *Three Little Pigs*, an all-color animated cartoon, delighted audiences in 1933. Donald Duck made his debut in *Orphan’s Benefit* (1936). Like Henry Ford, Disney put the animation process on a mass-production basis. With *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), he moved from short cartoons to feature-length films. His *Fantasia* (1940), featuring imaginative and colorful visual sequences accompanying well-known musical works, marked a watershed in animation history.

These technological developments had a profound cultural and economic impact. Thanks to sound, color, and animation—along with marketing innovations such as double features (1931) and drive-in theaters (1933)—the movie industry not only survived but prospered in the hard times of the 1930s. Movies



GONE WITH THE WIND (1939) An early triumph of the new technology of color film. (Christies Images, Inc.)

provided cheap entertainment, and the technical breakthroughs of these years added to their appeal and novelty.

The addition of sound proved especially important. A series of musicals with elaborate dance routines choreographed by Busby Berkeley, such as *Footlight Parade* (1933), enjoyed great popularity. Dancers Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers wove together music and dance in *Flying Down to Rio* (1933) and other films. Disney integrated music in many of his animated films.

The added realism that sound brought to films added to the alarm of the Catholic Legion of Decency and other conservative groups concerned about the moral effect on the young of sexual suggestiveness in romantic movies and brutal violence in gangster films. To forestall a movement to boycott or censor objectionable movies, Hollywood in 1934 adopted a production code that imposed strict rules on what could be shown or spoken in films.

The new technologies also affected the economics of filmmaking. The high costs involved in converting to sound and color encouraged consolidation and mergers, reducing the number of smaller producers. As the studios borrowed heavily to acquire the new technologies, Wall Street gained an increasingly important role in the industry. The rise of corporate power in Hollywood had a subtle but distinct effect on film content, encouraging escapist, predictable formula films most likely to turn a profit, and discouraging riskier work and critical explorations of the darker corners of American society.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

- Comparing color and sound, which do you think probably did more to increase the popularity of movies during the depression of the 1930s? Why?
- How did these new technologies affect the economics of the film industry itself?

general Francisco Franco began a military revolt against Spain's legally elected government, a coalition of left-wing parties. With aid from Hitler and Mussolini, Franco won backing from Spanish monarchists, landowners, industrialists, and the Catholic Church.

The Spanish Loyalists (that is, those loyal to Spain's elected government) won support from U.S. writers, artists, and intellectuals who backed the Popular Front, including the writer Ernest Hemingway, who visited Spain in 1936–1937. In contrast to his antiwar novels of the 1920s (see Chapter 23), Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) told of a young American volunteer who dies while fighting with the Loyalists. For Hemingway, the Spanish Civil War offered a cause “in which you felt an absolute brotherhood with the others who were engaged in it.”

The Popular Front collapsed in August 1939 when Stalin and Hitler signed a non-aggression pact. Overnight, enthusiasm for joining with communists under the “antifascism” banner faded. But while it lasted, the Popular Front influenced U.S. culture and alerted Americans to threatening events abroad.

The New Deal's programs for writers, artists, and musicians, as well as its turn leftward in 1935–1936, also contributed to the late 1930s' cultural shift. More positive views now replaced the cynical tone of the 1920s and early 1930s. In John Steinbeck's best-selling

novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), an uprooted dust-bowl family, the Joads, make their difficult way from Oklahoma to California along Route 66. Steinbeck stressed ordinary Americans' endurance, cooperation, and mutual support. As Ma Joad tells her son Tom, “They ain't gonna wipe us out. Why, we're the people—we go on.” Made into a movie starring Henry Fonda, *The Grapes of Wrath* stands as a memorable cultural document of the later 1930s.

In 1936, journalist James Agee and photographer Walker Evans lived with Alabama sharecropper families while researching a magazine article. From this experience came Agee's masterpiece, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). Enhanced by Evans's photographs, Agee's work evoked the strength and decency of depression-era Americans.

On the stage, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938) lovingly portrayed early-twentieth-century life in a New England town. William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* (1939) celebrated the foibles and virtues of a colorful group of patrons gathered in a San Francisco waterfront bar.

Composers, too, caught the spirit of cultural nationalism. In such works as *Billy the Kid* (1938), Aaron Copland drew upon American legends and folk melodies. George Gershwin's 1935 musical *Porgy and Bess*, based on DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's 1920s' novel and play (see Chapter 23), brought this portrayal of black life in Charleston, South Carolina, to a larger audience.

Jazz gained popularity thanks to swing, a danceable style originated by pianist Fletcher Henderson and popularized by the bands of Count Basie, Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, and others. The Basie band started at Kansas City's Reno Club, where, as Basie later recalled, “We played from nine o'clock in the evening to five or six the next morning. . . . [T]he boys in the band got eighteen dollars a week and I got twenty one.” Moving to New York in 1936, Basie helped launch the swing era.

Benny Goodman, of a Chicago immigrant family, had played the clarinet as a boy at Jane Addams's Hull House. Challenging racial prejudices, Goodman included black musicians in his orchestra. The Goodman band's 1938 performance at New York's Carnegie Hall, a citadel of high culture, underscored jazz's growing cultural influence.

The later 1930s also saw a heightened interest in regional literature, painting, and folk art. Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) portrayed a black woman's search for fulfillment in rural Florida. William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) continued the saga of his mythic Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi. Painters Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri (descended from a nineteenth-century senator of the same name),



LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN (1941) Journalist James Agee and photographer Walker Evans created a memorable record of a month spent with Alabama sharecroppers in 1936. (Photography Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin General Libraries)



GRANT WOOD'S PARSON WEEMS' FABLE, 1939 The story of George Washington and the cherry tree first appeared in the 1806 edition of a popular biography by the Rev. Mason Weems. Grant Wood's whimsical representation of the tale reflected a late-1930s tendency in the arts to portray American themes in a positive and affirmative way. ("Parson Weems Fable" by Grant Wood 1939, oil on canvas, 38 3/8 x 50 1/8 inches. Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth Texas, 1970.43)

John Stuart Curry of Kansas, and Iowa's Grant Wood explored traditional and regional themes in their work.

Galleries displayed folk paintings, Amish quilts, and New England weather vanes. A 1938 show at New York's Museum of Modern Art introduced Horace Pippin, a black Philadelphia laborer partially disabled in World War I. In such paintings as *John Brown Going to His Hanging*, Pippin revealed a genuine, if untutored, talent. In 1939 the same museum featured seventy-nine-year-old Anna "Grandma" Moses of Hoosick Falls, New York, whose memory paintings of her farm girlhood enjoyed great popularity.

The surge of cultural nationalism heightened interest in American history. Visitors flocked to historical re-creations such as Henry Ford's Greenfield Village near Detroit and Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, restored by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Texans restored the Alamo in San Antonio, the "Cradle of Texas Liberty." Historical novels like Margaret Mitchell's Civil War epic *Gone with the Wind* (1936)

became best sellers. These restorations and fictions often distorted history. Colonial Williamsburg and Mitchell's novel downplayed or romanticized slavery. "Texas Liberty" resonated differently for the state's Hispanic, African-American, and Indian peoples than it did for the white patriotic organizations that venerated the Alamo.

Streamlining and a World's Fair: Corporate America's Utopian Vision

A design style called streamlining also shaped the visual culture of the late 1930s. This style originated in the 1920s when industrial designers, inspired by the airplane, introduced flowing curves into the design of commercial products. Consumers loved streamlining—a vital business consideration during the depression. When Sears Roebuck streamlined its Coldspot refrigerators, sales surged. As products ranging from house trailers to pencil sharpeners and cigarette lighters emerged in sleek new forms,



ORSON WELLES DIRECTS *WAR OF THE WORLDS*

CBS radio's dramatization of an invasion from Mars in October 1938 terrified many listeners already jittery over worsening world conditions. (Culver Pictures)

streamlining helped corporate America rebuild its image and present itself as the shaper of a better future.

Under the theme “The World of Tomorrow,” the 1939 New York World’s Fair represented the high point of the streamlining vogue and of corporate America’s public-relations blitz. The Trylon and Perisphere, a soaring tapered tower and a globe that seemed to float on water symbolized the fair’s futuristic theme. Inside the Perisphere, visitors found

“Democracy,” a revolving diorama portraying an idealized city of the future.

At Futurama, the General Motors exhibit, visitors entered a darkened auditorium where, amid piped-in music and a resonant recorded narration, a vision of America in the distant year 1960 slowly unfolded. A multilane highway network complete with cloverleaf exits and stacked interchanges dominated the imagined landscape. A brilliant public-relations investment, Futurama built support for the interstate highway system that would soon become a reality. Forget the depression and the bitter auto-workers’ strike, GM’s exhibit seemed to whisper; behold the exciting future we are preparing for you.

Also featuring such wonders as television and automatic dishwashers, the World’s Fair portrayed “The World of Tomorrow” as a technological utopia created by America’s corporations. A visit to the fair, a business magazine editorialized, “should convince [any doubters] that American business has been the vehicle which carried the discoveries of science and the benefits of machine production to . . . American consumers.” The fair epitomized corporate America’s version of the patriotism and hopefulness stirring in America as the 1930s ended.

But the hopefulness was tinged with fear, as danger loomed beyond the seas. The anxiety triggered by the menacing world situation surfaced on October 31, 1938, when CBS radio aired an adaptation of H. G. Wells’s science-fiction story *War of the Worlds* directed by Orson Welles. In realistic detail, the broadcast reported the landing of a spaceship in New Jersey and aliens with ray guns advancing toward New York City. The show sparked a panic. Some terrified listeners jumped in their cars and sped off into the night. Others prayed. A few attempted suicide. Beneath the terror lay a more well-founded fear: of approaching war. For a decade, as America had battled the depression, the international situation had steadily worsened. By October 1938, another European war loomed on the horizon.

The panic triggered by Orson Welles’s Halloween prank quickly faded, but the anxieties aroused by the all-too-real dangers abroad only escalated. By the time the New York World’s Fair offered its hopeful vision of the future, the actual world of 1939 looked bleak indeed.

CHRONOLOGY

1929–1939

1929	Stock market crash; onset of depression.	1935 (Cont.)	Supreme Court reverses conviction of the “Scottsboro Boys.” Harlem protests and riot.
1932	Reconstruction Finance Corporation. Veterans’ bonus march. Franklin D. Roosevelt elected president.	1935–1939	Era of the Popular Front.
1933	Repeal of Eighteenth Amendment. Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA). Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA). National Recovery Administration (NRA). Public Works Administration (PWA).	1936	Supreme Court declares AAA unconstitutional. Roosevelt wins landslide reelection victory. Autoworkers’ sit-down strike against General Motors begins (December).
1934	Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Taylor Grazing Act. Indian Reorganization Act.	1937	Roosevelt’s “court-packing” plan defeated. Farm Security Administration. GM, U.S. Steel, and Chrysler sign union contracts.
1934–1936	Strikes by Mexican-American agricultural workers in the West.	1934	Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Taylor Grazing Act. Indian Reorganization Act.
1935	Supreme Court declares NIRA unconstitutional. Works Progress Administration (WPA). Resettlement Administration. National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act). Social Security Act. NAACP campaign for federal antilynching law. Huey Long assassinated. Revenue Act raises taxes on corporations and the wealthy.	1937–1938	The “Roosevelt recession.”
		1938	Fair Labor Standards Act. Republicans gain heavily in midterm elections. Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) formed. Carnegie Hall concert by Benny Goodman Orchestra. Orson Welles’ “War of the Worlds” radio broadcast.
		1939	Hatch Act. Marian Anderson concert at Lincoln Memorial. John Steinbeck, <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> .
		1940	Ernest Hemingway, <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i> .

CONCLUSION

The stock-market crash and the Great Depression exposed major weaknesses in the U.S. and world economies. These ranged from chronically low farm prices and uneven income distribution to trade barriers, a glut of consumer goods, and a constricted money supply. As the crisis deepened, President Hoover struggled to respond. In 1932, with Hoover discredited, Franklin D. Roosevelt and his promised “New Deal” brought a surge of hope.

Initially focusing on immediate economic relief and recovery, Roosevelt welcomed big business in his depression-fighting coalition. By 1935, however, the New Deal adopted a more class-based approach. FDR now addressed the plight of the poor, including

sharecroppers and migrants; pursued business regulation and higher taxes for the wealthy; and championed such fundamental reforms as Social Security, centerpiece of the welfare state, and the Wagner Act, guaranteeing workers’ right to unionize. His smashing reelection victory in 1936 solidified FDR’s Democratic coalition, including the white South, farmers, urban ethnics, union members, and African-Americans. By 1938, facing conservative opposition and menaces abroad, the New Deal’s reformist energies faded.

The depression and the New Deal affected different groups in different ways. For citizens across the West and in the region served by TVA, public-works projects brought hydroelectric power and economic growth, while the New Deal also

renewed attention to conservation and environmental issues. Women were told to stay home so jobless men could find work. Many resisted, however, and the female labor force expanded. For industrial workers, the decade's spirit of militance and favorable legislation brought a wave of strikes and unionization campaigns.

While African-Americans benefited from New Deal relief programs, the Roosevelt administration failed to address lynching and racial discrimination. Mexican-born farm laborers, facing deportation threats, organized strikes demanding better wages and working conditions. For Native Americans, New Deal legislation restored tribes' legal status, laying the groundwork for future enterprises and treaty claims.

American culture in the 1930s reflected the decade's economic and social realities. While movies and radio offered diversion, writers, painters, and other cultural creators initially expressed disillusionment over capitalism's failure. But as New Deal programs inspired hope, and as foreign threats loomed, the later 1930s brought a more upbeat and affirmative cultural climate.

The New Deal has its downside. Some programs failed, and recovery proved elusive. Only in 1943, as war plants boomed, did full employment return.

On racial issues, symbolic gestures substituted for genuine engagement. But the New Deal's achievements remain impressive, reflecting an unprecedented level of governmental engagement with social and economic issues. FDR and his administration reshaped the role of the presidency, the Supreme Court, the nation's political agenda, and citizens' expectations of government's role in meeting urgent public needs.

Looming over the decade is the larger-than-life image of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Neither saint nor superman, FDR could be devious, superficial, and cavalier about details. But for most Americans of the 1930s—and most historians since—his strengths outweighed his liabilities. His experimental approach served a suffering nation well. He once compared himself to a football quarterback, deciding which play to call after seeing how the last one worked out.

Above all, Roosevelt's optimism inspired a demoralized people. "We Americans of today..." he told an audience of young people in 1939, "are characters in the living book of democracy. But we are also its author. It falls upon us now to say whether the chapters ... to come will tell a story of retreat or a story of continued advance."

KEY TERMS

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (p. 729)

Eleanor Roosevelt (p. 729)

Reconstruction Finance

Corporation (p. 731)

Frances Perkins (p. 736)

Harold Ickes (p. 736)

Civilian Conservation

Corps (p. 737)

Federal Emergency Relief

Act (p. 737)

Harry Hopkins (p. 737)

Agricultural Adjustment

Administration (p. 737)

Public Works Administration

(p. 737)

National Recovery Administration

(p. 737)

Tennessee Valley Authority

(p. 738)

Works Progress Administration

(p. 742)

National Labor Relations Act

(Wagner Act) (p. 744)

Social Security Act (p. 744)

Farm Security Administration

(p. 748)

Fair Labor Standards Act (p. 748)

Congress of Industrial

Organizations (p. 752)

Indian Reorganization Act (p. 754)

Popular Front (p. 755)

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