

The Americans (Reconstruction to the 21st Century)

Chapter 15:

TELESCOPING THE TIMES The New Deal

CHAPTER OVERVIEW President Roosevelt launches a program aiming to end the Depression. The Depression and his New Deal have profound effects.

Section 1 : A New Deal Fights the Depression

MAIN IDEA After becoming president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt used government programs to combat the Depression.

In the 1932 election, Franklin Delano Roosevelt—or FDR—won a landslide victory, and Democrats took control of the House and Senate. His policies were called the New Deal. The first step was to reform banking: many were closing, causing panic. The new president tried to end the crisis by temporarily closing banks and passing a number of new laws. He reassured the nation in a radio “fireside chat” that explained his policies.

Roosevelt acted to help farmers and other workers. The Agricultural Adjustment Act raised food prices. Other agencies hired jobless workers for conservation or building projects. An agency was created to help the needy. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) promoted industrial growth. The Tennessee Valley Authority brought flood control and electricity to a poor region.

The president’s actions were attacked by liberals as not enough and by conservatives as too radical. When the Supreme Court overturned the NIRA and another New Deal law, Roosevelt proposed a plan to add his own justices to the Court. It failed. Eventually the Court backed the New Deal, but the court scheme cost him support.

Three critics of Roosevelt rose to prominence. Father Charles Coughlin blasted the president on his popular radio show. Dr. Francis Townsend proposed a national pension

for the elderly. Huey Long, a politician from Louisiana, proclaimed a plan called “Share Our Wealth.”

Section 2: The Second New Deal Takes Hold

MAIN IDEA The Second New Deal included new programs to extend federal aid and stimulate the nation's economy.

The economy improved, but not enough. Buoyed by Democratic gains in Congress, Roosevelt launched the Second New Deal to provide additional relief to farmers and workers. Helping him maintain popularity was his wife, Eleanor. The president easily won re-election in 1936.

The Supreme Court had struck down the first New Deal act to help farmers. In the Second New Deal, Roosevelt won passage of new laws aimed at conserving soil, providing loans, and offering mortgage relief. A new agency, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), was started to fund projects that would create jobs. Between 1935 and 1943, it gave jobs to more than 8 million people. They built public buildings, made clothes and constructed or repaired 651,000 miles of roads and streets.

The Second New Deal tried to help workers by setting a national minimum wage, limiting the work week, and requiring employers to pay overtime. The Wagner Act recognized workers' right to organize unions.

The Second New Deal also set up the social security system. It made payments to retirees, disabled workers, the unemployed, and families with dependent children.

Finally, the Second New Deal included the Rural Electrification Administration. It provided more electrical power in rural areas.

Section 3: The New Deal Affects Many Groups

MAIN IDEA The New Deal policies and actions affected various social and ethnic groups.

Women benefited from the New Deal. Agencies did not discriminate in hiring, giving many women new opportunities. Roosevelt named the first female cabinet secretary—Frances Perkins—and appointed many women judges. Women still struggled against discrimination, however. Agencies and businesses did not hire women in proportion to their numbers in the population, and women continued to be paid less than men.

Mary McLeod Bethune, an African-American woman, became head of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Association. She helped blacks gain access to the agency's programs and organized an unofficial "Black Cabinet" to advise the president. Roosevelt, however, never pressed for full civil rights for African Americans; he feared losing the support of white Southerners. Despite this lack of vigorous support for civil rights, most African Americans backed him and the New Deal. Mexican Americans did, too. Roosevelt's Commissioner of Indian Affairs helped pass the Indian Reorganization Act, strengthening Native American land claims.

Roosevelt and the Democratic party forged a new political coalition of Southern whites, urban voters, African Americans, and unionized workers. Labor was a key part of this coalition. New Deal laws made it easier for workers to organize. During the 1930s, union membership soared from less than 3 to more than 10 million. The United Mine Workers and United Auto Workers, with some other unions, split from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to form a new group, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). To win gains, labor often had to strike. Sometimes the strikes turned violent.

Section 4: Culture in the 1930s

MAIN IDEA Motion pictures, radio, art, and literature blossomed during the New Deal.

During the Depression, the radio and film industries flourished. About 90 percent of all households owned radios, and 65 percent of the population went to a movie once a week. The movies offered drama, comedies, and entertaining musicals. Hollywood became identified with glamour and sophistication. Families typically gathered by their radio each evening to hear their favorite shows. President Roosevelt addressed the nation in his “fireside chats” on several occasions.

The art and literature of the 1930s was more sober, offering serious critiques of American society or uplifting messages about the strength of character and values of the people. One branch of the WPA, the Federal Arts Project, paid artists to create posters, murals, and other public works of art. The Federal Theater Project brought drama to communities across the country. Some writers had work funded by the Federal Writers’ Project. A famous author of the period was John Steinbeck. His novel *The Grapes of Wrath* showed the suffering caused by the Dust Bowl.

Section 5: The Impact of the New Deal

MAIN IDEA The New Deal affected American society not only in the 1930s but also in the decades that followed.

By 1937, the economy had recovered enough to convince many Americans that the Depression was over. Unemployment, still high, was much less than earlier in the decade. Many politicians pushed Roosevelt to cut back on New Deal programs. He did, and the economy fell back again. However, Roosevelt did not restore the New Deal.

Opinion on the New Deal still differs. Conservatives say that under Roosevelt the federal government grew too large and extended into everyday life. Liberals say that the New Deal didn’t go far enough in restructuring the economy and wealth. Supporters say that Roosevelt managed a balance between preserving the existing economic system and reforming it.

The New Deal did result in expanded power for the federal government. It also relieved the suffering of many people, struggling in the midst of the Depression's harshest years. It boosted the rights of workers to unionize and aided farmers by creating a program of price supports that remained in effect for decades. Many banking and finance reforms begun under the New Deal are still in action, and Americans are still benefiting from Roosevelt's environmental protection efforts. Perhaps the longest-lasting New Deal programs are social security and the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority.