

The Caring First Lady

Eleanor Roosevelt played a crucial role in the New Deal. She traveled to places FDR could not, advised her husband, and served as an inspiration to millions of Americans. Mrs. Roosevelt also corresponded with thousands of citizens. The following letter reflects the affection that many citizens felt for the first lady.

“Ridley Park, Pennsylvania

Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

... Just to look at your picture and that of our President seems to me like looking at the picture of a saint. So when you answered my letter and promised to have some one help me it only proved that you are our own Mrs. Roosevelt. I have told everyone what you have done for me. I want them to know you are not too busy to answer our letters and give us what help and advice you can. You hold the highest place any woman can hold still you are not to[o] proud to befriend the poor. ... Thank you and God bless you both.”

—Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, September 1, 1935

▲ Eleanor Roosevelt serves food to unemployed women and their children.

Effects of the New Deal

Objectives

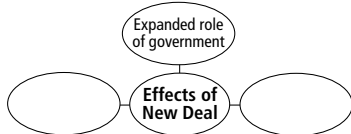
- Describe how the New Deal affected different groups in American society.
- Analyze how the New Deal changed the shape of American party politics.
- Discuss the impact of Franklin D. Roosevelt on the presidency.

Terms and People

Black Cabinet	New Deal coalition
Mary McLeod Bethune	welfare state
Indian New Deal	

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas As you read, identify the lasting effects of the New Deal upon American society.



Why It Matters The New Deal provided desperately needed relief from the depression and enacted reforms that guarded against economic catastrophe. It did not end the depression. World War II, with its massive military spending, would do that. Yet, the New Deal mattered enormously because it brought fundamental changes to the nation. It changed the role of the federal government in the economy, the power of the presidency, and the relationship of the American people to their government. **Section Focus Question: How did the New Deal change the social, economic, and political landscape of the United States for future generations?**

Women Help Lead the New Deal

The New Deal provided some women with the opportunity to increase their political influence and to promote women's rights. Foremost among them was Eleanor Roosevelt, who transformed the office of First Lady from a largely ceremonial role to a position of action and deep involvement in the political process. Representing the President, she toured the nation. She visited farms and Indian reservations and traveled deep into a coal mine. She helped FDR on his campaigns and offered advice on policy issues. In her newspaper column, "My Day," she called on Americans to live up to the goal of equal justice for all.


“Eleanor Roosevelt is the First Lady of Main Street,” explained magazine writer Margaret Marshall. “She occupies the highest social position in the land. Yet she makes friends on a plane or a train even as you and I.” Mrs. Roosevelt’s causes included advancing public health and education, promoting the arts in rural areas, and even addressing flood control. She exhibited boundless energy, traveling more than 60,000 miles in two years.

Molly Dewson, head of the Women’s Division of the Democratic Party, observed that Eleanor Roosevelt provided women with an unprecedented access to the President. “When I wanted help on some definite point, Mrs. Roosevelt gave [me] the opportunity to sit by the President at dinner and the matter was settled before we finished our soup.”

The Roosevelt Administration included the first female Cabinet member, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins. She played a leading role in establishing Social Security. Perkins also helped win approval of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which ended child labor and established a minimum wage.

However, the New Deal did not fight to end gender discrimination in the workplace. Indeed, some historians have argued that a number of New Deal programs reinforced traditional gender differences. The WPA and other relief programs employed women but made a much greater effort to provide work to men first. For example, women were not eligible to work for the CCC. However, the increased homeownership and insured savings accounts brought by the New Deal were of special benefit to the widows of men who were covered.

Vocabulary Builder
gender—(JEHN der) *n.* a person’s sex

 **Checkpoint** What impact did the New Deal have on women?

African Americans Make Advances and Face Challenges

When the depression hit, African American workers were often the first to lose their jobs. By 1934, the unemployment rate for African Americans was almost 50 percent, more than twice the national average. Eleanor Roosevelt and others urged the President to improve the situation of African Americans.

As the New Deal progressed, Eleanor Roosevelt increasingly used her position to protest against racial discrimination. At a meeting held by the Southern Conference on Human Welfare, a biracial group that sought to promote racial reforms, the first lady sat with the black delegates—a daring move in segregated Birmingham, Alabama. When a white police officer told her that she was violating local segregation laws, Mrs. Roosevelt moved her chair to the space between the black and white sides. She then delivered a rousing and provocative keynote address in favor of racial reform.

Primary Source

“We are the leading democracy of the world and as such must prove to the world that democracy is possible and capable of living up to the principles upon which it was founded. The eyes of the world are upon us, and often we find they are not too friendly eyes.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt, November 22, 1938

HISTORY MAKERS

Frances Perkins (1882–1965)

After graduating from college, Frances Perkins earned her master’s degree in economics. From 1912, until being named Secretary of Labor, she held various jobs in New York State government. She was a strong voice for consumers and workers, especially working women and children.



Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955)

Mary McLeod Bethune was a teacher who worked to improve educational opportunities for African Americans. Bethune served as FDR’s special adviser on minority affairs. As the director of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration, Bethune was the first black woman to head a federal agency.



The President invited many African American leaders to advise him. These unofficial advisers became known as the **Black Cabinet**. They included Robert Weaver and William Hastie, Harvard University graduates who rose to high positions within the Department of the Interior. Hastie later became a federal judge, and Weaver was the first African American Cabinet member.

Mary McLeod Bethune was another member of the Black Cabinet. The founder of what came to be known as Bethune Cookman College, she was a powerful champion of racial equality. In her view, the New Deal had created a “new day” for African Americans. She noted that African Americans gained unprecedented access to the White House and positions within the government during Roosevelt’s presidency.

Nevertheless, Roosevelt did not always follow the advice of his Black Cabinet. Racial discrimination and injustice continued to plague African Americans. When the NAACP launched an energetic campaign in favor of a federal anti-lynching law, the President refused to support it. FDR told black leaders that he could not support an anti-lynching law, because if he did, southern Democrats “would block every bill I ask Congress to pass.” Hence, no civil rights reforms became law during the 1930s.

Several New Deal measures also unintentionally hurt African Americans. Federal payments to farmers to produce fewer crops led white landowners to evict unneeded black sharecroppers from their farms. Even though they benefited from the WPA and other relief measures, African Americans often did not receive equal wages. Social Security and the Fair Labor Standards Act exempted domestic workers and farm laborers, two occupations in which African Americans were employed in great numbers.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did the New Deal affect African Americans?

Native Americans Benefit From Building Projects

Navajo medicine men attend the opening of a new hospital in Fort Defiance, Arizona, in 1938. *How was this project part of the Indian New Deal?*

The New Deal Affects Native Americans


Attempting to improve the lives of Native Americans, the Roosevelt administration made major changes in long-standing policies. The 1887 Dawes Act had divided tribal lands into smaller plots. By the early 1930s, it was clear that the



act had worsened the condition of the people it was designed to help. Of the original 138 million acres American Indians had owned in 1887, only 48 million remained in American Indian hands, and much of it was too arid to farm. John Collier, the New Deal's Commissioner of Indian Affairs, warned that the Dawes Act was resulting in "total landlessness for the Indians."

To prevent further loss of land and improve living conditions for Native Americans, Collier developed the **Indian New Deal**, a program that gave Indians economic assistance and greater control over their own affairs. Collier got funding from New Deal agencies for the construction of new schools and hospitals and to create an Indian Civilian Conservation Corps. In addition, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, in a reversal of previous policies, encouraged the practice of Indian religions, native languages, and traditional customs. Collier also convinced Congress to pass the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, considered the centerpiece of the Indian New Deal. This law restored tribal control over Native American land.

Although it did not immediately improve their standard of living, the Indian Reorganization Act gave Native Americans greater control over their destiny. But some New Deal measures actually hurt Native Americans. For example, federal authorities determined that large herds of sheep tended by the Navajos were causing soil erosion on the Colorado Plateau. As a result, the federal government enacted a Navajo Livestock Reduction program, which mandated that the Navajo sell or kill thousands of sheep. The Navajo deeply resented this act. They did not believe that their sheep threatened the soil and they did not trust the motives of government agents.

 **Checkpoint** In what ways did the New Deal alter the U.S. policies toward Native Americans?

The New Deal Creates a New Political Coalition

By the time he died in 1945, Roosevelt had been elected to four terms as President. His legendary political skills had united an unlikely group of Americans into a strong political force called the **New Deal coalition**. This coalition brought together southern whites, northern blue-collar workers—especially those with immigrant roots—poor midwestern farmers, and African Americans.

African American voting patterns show the importance of the New Deal coalition. Before the New Deal, most African Americans voted Republican, the party of Abraham Lincoln. Responding to the efforts of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, African Americans began to vote Democratic during the 1930s. This trend was strongest in the West and the North. For example, in 1934, Arthur W. Mitchell, an African American Democrat, defeated Oscar De Priest, an African American Republican, to represent the largely black south side of Chicago. Mitchell became the first African American Democrat elected to Congress.

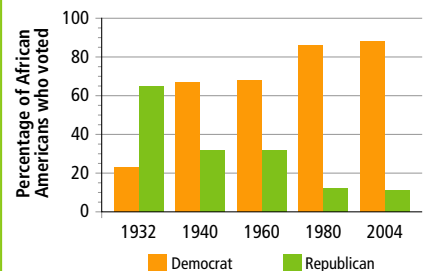
The New Deal coalition gave the Democratic Party a sizable majority in both houses of Congress. Before FDR's election, the Democrats had been the minority party in the House of Representatives for all but eight years since 1895. But from 1932 to 1995, the Democrats controlled the majority of seats in the House of Representatives for all but four years. The coalition that elected Roosevelt in 1932 went on to secure the White House for the Democrats in six of the next eight presidential elections.

African Americans Join New Deal Coalition

In Atlanta, African Americans register to vote in a Democratic primary election. *What percentage of African American voters voted Democratic in 1932? What was the percentage in 2004?*



Presidential Vote of African Americans, 1932–2004



SOURCES: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; Donald L. Grant, *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia*; Sean J. Savage, *Roosevelt: The Party Leader, 1932–1945*; CNN.com

Vocabulary Builder

ethnic—(EHTH nihk) *adj.* relating to groups of people with a common national, racial, religious, or cultural heritage

Besides forging a powerful political coalition, Roosevelt and the New Deal helped to unify the nation. Social and ethnic divisions, so much a part of the 1920s, diminished significantly during the 1930s. Immigrant communities, in particular, gained a greater sense of belonging to the mainstream. Programs such as the CCC and WPA allowed individuals of varied backgrounds to get to know one another, breaking down regional and ethnic prejudices. As one CCC worker observed:

Primary Source

“The Civilian Conservation Corps is a smaller melting pot within the big one. We are thrown together in such a way that we have to get acquainted whether or not we want to. . . . Different races and nationalities look each other in the face, work and eat together for the first time. And it is a safe bet, we think, that this process many times results in the elimination of traditional prejudices based on ignorance and misinformation.”

—C. W. Kirkpatrick, CCC worker



Checkpoint How did New Deal policies affect ethnic and social divisions?

The Role of Government Expands

New Deal programs greatly increased the size and scope of the federal government. “For the first time for many Americans,” writes historian William Leuchtenburg, “the federal government became an institution that was directly experienced. More than the state and local governments, it came to be *the* government.” Moreover, the government began to do things it had never done before, from withdrawing taxes directly from workers’ paychecks to distributing benefits to the elderly.

Though the New Deal did not end the depression, it did help restore the American economy. It created the foundation for sustained and stable growth. According to Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Kennedy, “the unparalleled economic vitality of the post-1940 decades was attributable to many factors. But the [economic expansion] . . . owed much to the New Deal.”

Playing a Larger Role in the Economy With the New Deal, the federal government broke from the tradition of *laissez faire*, or leaving the economy alone, which had characterized most of American history. Now the federal government accepted responsibility for spurring economic growth, or pump priming. For the first time, the government had acted as an employer of the unemployed and a sponsor of work projects. FDR accepted the idea that the federal government had to do something to get the economy going again, and Democrats and many Republicans agreed.

FDR’s rejection of *laissez-faire* policies led a number of New Deal critics to accuse him of promoting socialism. However, many New Deal measures actually strengthened capitalism and helped make possible the economic boom of the post–World War II era. The FDIC and SEC restored Americans’ trust in banks and the stock market. The Federal Housing Authority (FHA) provided low-interest loans, increasing homeownership.

The New Deal affected millions of workers and their families. The Wagner Act boosted union membership, which continued to grow after World War II. Minimum wage increases improved the purchasing power of minorities and those at the bottom rung of the economic ladder. New Deal legislation created child labor laws, workers’ compensation laws, and unemployment insurance, programs that had important and enduring impacts on the U.S. economy.

The New Deal had a great impact on rural Americans. Regional public-works projects, such as the TVA and Bonneville Dam, reduced flooding and provided water for irrigation. Along with the Rural Electrification Administration, these dams brought electricity to farmers in the Southeast and the Northwest. Rose Dudley Searce of Shelby, Kentucky, recalled what the REA meant to her farm family:

Primary Source

“The first benefit we received from the REA was light, and aren’t lights grand? My little boy expressed my sentiments when he said, ‘Mother, I didn’t realize how dark our house was until we got electric lights.’ . . . Like the rest of the people, we changed our storage-battery radio into an electric radio. . . . Next we bought an electric refrigerator. . . . The next benefit we received from the current was our electric stove. . . . Now with a vacuum cleaner, I can even dust the furniture before I clean the carpet, the carpet gets clean, and I stay in good humor.”

—Rose Dudley Searce, “What the REA Service Means to Our Farm House”

INFOGRAPHIC

P.W.A. and W.P.A. PROJECTS

The Public Works Administration (PWA) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) were New Deal government agencies that provided work relief for people who had lost their jobs during the depression.

Both agencies focused on large public-works projects that benefited local communities across the nation. Their combined efforts produced thousands of schools, hospitals, parks, bridges, dams, housing developments, libraries, and other public buildings. They also built or improved thousands of miles of roads and highways, installed sewer systems, and conducted environmental-conservation projects.



Thinking Critically

Analyze Besides giving jobs to the unemployed, describe other ways that PWA and WPA projects might have helped local economies.

Creating a Welfare State “We are going to make a country in which no one is left out,” Franklin Roosevelt once told Frances Perkins. The many programs he enacted to realize this goal led to the rise of a **welfare state** in the United States, a government that assumes responsibility for providing for the welfare of children and the poor, elderly, sick, disabled, and unemployed.

The creation of the American welfare state was a major change in government policy. With the exception of military veterans, most Americans had never received any direct benefits from the federal government. State and local governments, private charities, and families had long served as the safety net for needy Americans. True, the New Deal did not achieve FDR’s goal of “a country in which no one is left out,” because it exempted many Americans from Social Security and other programs. Still, the New Deal established the principle that the federal government was responsible for the welfare of all Americans. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the reach of government programs would grow greatly.



Cause and Effect

Causes

- Stock market crash
- Failure of farms and businesses
- Sharp decline in prices and production
- Failure of banks
- Massive unemployment and low wages
- Homelessness and Hoovervilles
- Drought, crop failures, and Dust Bowl



The New Deal

Effects

- Millions employed in new government programs
- Banking system is stabilized
- Regulated stock market restores confidence
- Social-insurance programs aid elderly and poor
- Agricultural subsidies help farmers
- Government takes more active role in economy



Connections to Today

- Social Security and other New Deal programs still exist
- Size and role of federal government still debated
- Costs and benefits of social welfare programs still debated

Analyze Cause and Effect The New Deal brought dramatic changes to the United States. *Identify one economic and one political effect of the New Deal.*

New Deal reforms provided the framework for the debate over the proper role of the federal government in the private lives of Americans. It energized liberals who would push for an even greater role for the federal government in future years. But it troubled conservatives who would argue that the expansion of the federal government limited American rights. Indeed, this very debate divides liberals and conservatives to this day.

Restoring the Environment Reared in New York State's beautiful Hudson River valley, Franklin Roosevelt had a great love of nature. As a child, FDR also loved outdoor sports and became an expert swimmer and sailor. A number of his New Deal programs, such as the CCC, aimed at restoring forests and preserving the environment. Other federal agencies started soil conservation efforts. Perhaps most visibly, New Dealers worked hard to end the Dust Bowl, a symbol of the degraded state of the land at the beginning of the depression.

Franklin Roosevelt also continued the conservation work of his cousin, President Theodore Roosevelt. Although funds were short, the government set aside about 12 million acres of land for new national parks, including Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, Kings Canyon National Park in California, and Olympic National Park in Washington State.

However, not all New Deal programs helped the environment. Several of the large public-works projects, such as the TVA and the string of dams along the Columbia River, had a mixed impact. The dams controlled floods, generated electric power, and provided irrigation, but they also upset the natural habitats of some aquatic life. Massive reservoirs created by these projects also displaced some people and destroyed some traditional Native American burial, hunting, and fishing grounds.

Changing the Nature of the Presidency In no area did FDR have a greater impact than on the office of the President itself. The expanding role of the government, including the creation of many new federal agencies, gave the executive branch much more power. New Deal administrators, such as Harry Hopkins, head of the WPA, commanded large bureaucracies with massive budgets and little supervision by Congress. Their authority increased Roosevelt's influence. Indeed, some commentators even began to speak of the rise of an imperial presidency, an unflattering comparison to the power exercised in the past by rulers of great empires.

FDR also affected the style of the presidency. His mastery of the radio captivated Americans. His close relations with the press assured a generally popular response to his projects from the major media. Because he served for such a long time and was such an outstanding communicator, FDR set a standard that future Presidents had a hard time fulfilling.

Later, during World War II, FDR's presidential power grew even greater. As commander in chief of the nation's armed forces, he exercised enormous authority over many aspects of life. Most Americans accepted the President's increased

FDR's Effect on the Presidency

Quick Study

- Increased power of the President and the executive branch
- Made mass media, such as radio, an essential tool in advertising and promoting policies
- Expanded role of the President in managing the economy
- Expanded role of the President in developing social policy
- Won third and fourth terms, leading to passage of Twenty-second Amendment, which limited Presidents to two consecutive terms



authority as a necessary condition of wartime. But after the war, they sought to protect the delicate balance between the different branches of government and between the federal and state governments.

One way that Americans sought to guard against the growing power of the President was by amending the Constitution. When Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented third term in 1940, he knew that he had broken an unwritten rule, established by George Washington, that Presidents should serve only two terms. He won that election and then ran and won again in 1944. But after Roosevelt's death in 1945, there was a growing call for limiting a President's term in office. In 1951, the Twenty-second Amendment was ratified, limiting the President to two consecutive terms.



Checkpoint In what ways did the role of the federal government grow during Franklin Roosevelt's presidency?

The Presidency After Roosevelt

Franklin Roosevelt had a dramatic impact on the role of the presidency. *Was FDR's impact positive or negative?*

SECTION

3 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nea-0906

Comprehension

- 1. Terms and People** What is the relationship between each of the following terms or people and the enduring significance of the New Deal?
 - Black Cabinet
 - Mary McLeod Bethune
 - Indian New Deal
 - New Deal coalition
 - welfare state

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Identify Main Ideas Use your concept web to answer the Section Focus Question: How did the New Deal change the social, economic, and political landscape of the United States for future generations?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Draw Conclusions

After comparing information from different sources, the next step in synthesizing is to draw conclusions. Compare the photograph of Eleanor Roosevelt with the primary source on the section's opening page. Write a paragraph that describes Mrs. Roosevelt's personality.

Critical Thinking

- 4. Recognize Cause and Effect** Why do you think African Americans suffered more extensive discrimination during the depression than during more prosperous times?
- 5. Determine Relevance** Has the New Deal coalition affected politics in your community today? Explain your answer.
- 6. Synthesize Information** Did the growth in the powers of the federal government during the New Deal benefit the nation? Explain your answer.