## Selected New Deal Programs

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Source: Encyclopedia of American History

**Interpreting Charts**  Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed a wide number of programs to aid in the nation’s recovery after he assumed office in 1933. These programs became the First New Deal. Two years later he outlined a broader program of social reform in the Second New Deal.

**Skills Assessment** Which New Deal programs continue to affect the lives of U.S. citizens?
"Brother, Can You Spare a Dime," lyrics by Yip Harburg, music by Jay Gorney (1931)
They used to tell me I was building a dream, and so I followed the mob,
When there was earth to plow, or guns to bear, I was always there right on the job.
They used to tell me I was building a dream, with peace and glory ahead,
Why should I be standing in line, just waiting for bread?
Once I built a railroad, I made it run, made it race against time.
Once I built a railroad; now it's done. Brother, can you spare a dime?
Once I built a tower, up to the sun, brick, and rivet, and lime;
Once I built a tower, now it's done. Brother, can you spare a dime?
Once in khaki suits, gee we looked swell,
Full of that Yankee Doodly Dum,
Half a million boots went slogging through Hell,
And I was the kid with the drum!
Say, don't you remember, they called me Al; it was Al all the time.
Why don't you remember, I'm your pal? Buddy, can you spare a dime?
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In this cartoon President Roosevelt is shown as a ventriloquist whose dummy refuses to cooperate.

"HECK WITH PACKIN' THE SUPREME COURT. I THINK YOU'RE ALL WET! AND AS FOR ECONOMY, HOW ABOUT ECONOMIZING ON SOME OF YOUR PET PROJECTS?"
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Source: *Encyclopedia of American History*

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**Skills Assessment** Which New Deal programs continue to affect the lives of U.S. citizens?
"Black Baseball"

Baseball was originally a "gentleman's game" played by members of rival athletic clubs for recreation. In the aftermath of the Civil War, baseball enjoyed a great surge in interest, activity and growth. Americans of all classes, creeds and races joined in the game that became our national pastime. Baseball was then still an amateur sport and some black Americans played on all-black ballclubs while others played on integrated teams.

However, black ballplayers were excluded from participation by the National Association of Baseball Players on December 11, 1868 when the governing body voted unanimously to bar "any club which may be composed of one or more colored persons." This was the first appearance of an official "color line" in baseball.

When baseball attained professional status the following season, pro teams were not bound by the amateur association's ruling, and during the 19th century black ballplayers appeared on integrated teams and some black teams played in integrated leagues. Two brothers, Moses Fleetwood Walker and Welday Walker, even played in the major leagues in 1884. But gradually, black players began to be excluded from the white leagues and by the beginning of the new century, there were no black players in organized baseball.

However, black Americans continued to play baseball. By necessity they played on all-black teams and eventually in all-black leagues. The first black professional team was the Cuban Giants in 1885, but the teams played as independent ballclubs until the first black league was organized in 1920.

That year Rube Foster, the father of black baseball, founded the Negro National League. Three years later, in 1923, Ed Bolden formed the Eastern Colored League. These two leagues operated successfully for several years before they fell victim to financial difficulties. Other black major leagues also operated for a single season but were not able to continue on a sound fiscal basis.

Eventually, two new leagues were organized. A new Negro National League was formed in 1933 and the Negro American League was chartered in 1937. These two leagues thrived until the color line was broken. During their existence, the Negro Leagues played eleven World Series (1924-27, 1942-48) and created their own All-Star game (1933-48) that became the biggest black sports attraction in the country.

The Negro National League folded following the 1948 season and, although black teams continued to play for several years, they were no longer of major league caliber. The demise of the Negro Leagues was inevitable as the younger black players were signed by the white major league franchises.
1920
National Prohibition Act goes into effect.
Ray Chapman of the Cleveland Indians is killed by a beanball.
Babe Ruth is sold to the New York Yankees.

1921
Baseball is broadcast on radio for the first time.

1922
Babe Ruth is suspended for 39 days after disregarding the order of Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis forbidding him from barnstorming between seasons.

1923
Yankee Stadium opens.
The Negro National League is a huge success.

1924
The Washington Senators win the World Series.

1925
Lou Gehrig replaces Wally Pipp in the Yankee lineup.

1927
Charles Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic flight.
The 1927 Yankees are considered one of the greatest baseball teams of all time.

1928
Ty Cobb retires as a player.

1929
Babe Ruth hits his 500th career home run.
1930
Babe Ruth signs a contract paying $80,000 a year.

1931
Josh Gibson of the Negro League hits over 70 home runs.

1932
Lou Gehrig hits four home runs in one game.
Babe Ruth hits his legendary "called shot" home run against Charlie Root and the Chicago Cubs.
Franklin Delano Roosevelt elected president.

1933
Major League Baseball's first All-Star game is played.

1934
Brothers Dizzy and Daffy Dean win 49 games.

1935
Major League Baseball's first night game is played.
Babe Ruth ends his career by hitting three home runs in one game.

1936
The Baseball Hall of Fame inducts its first five players.
Bob Feller makes his debut at age 17.

1938
Johnny Vander Meer pitches two consecutive no-hitters.

1939
Ted Williams makes his debut in the Major Leagues.
Lou Gehrig takes himself out of the lineup.
1941
Joe DiMaggio hits safely in 56 consecutive games.
Ted Williams hits .406 for the season.

1942
Pearl Harbor is bombed by Japan and the U.S. enters World War II.

1943
Branch Rickey is hired as President of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

1944
The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League is formed.
340 Major League players serve in World War II.

1945
Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis dies at age 71.

1946
World War II ends.
Jackie Robinson makes his Major League debut.

1947
First televised World Series.

1948
Larry Doby is the first African-American player in the American League.
Babe Ruth dies.
Satchel Paige makes his Major League debut.

1949
NATO formed.
To the Six of the Nine

Retire or move over!

U.S. Supreme Court

A Free and Independent Judiciary
HE JUST AIN'T FAST ENOUGH

THE OLD NINE

Pres. Roosevelt's Request for Six New Supreme Court Justices

BROOKLYN CITIZEN
THE HANDS OF DICTATORSHIP!

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT

GRASP FOR JUDICIARY
TRYING TO CHANGE THE UMPIRING

LISTEN—I DON'T LIKE YOUR DECISIONS.
FROM NOW ON, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO WORK WITH SOMEONE WHO CAN SEE THINGS MY WAY!

THE SUPREME COURT

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

NEW DEAL ACTS DECLARED UNCONSTITUTIONAL

A.R.A. OUT
A.A.A. OUT
O.R.I.G.INAL R.E.S.I.S.T.
A.A.A. TAX REMOVED
O.R.I.G.INAL R.E.S.I.S.T.
A.A.A. T.A.L. REMOVED
O.R.I.G.INAL R.E.S.I.S.T.
"Given the economic situation of 1932, the New Deal has been more helpful than harmful to Negroes."

The New Deal Has Aided Blacks

Robert C. Weaver (1907- )

The New Deal held a mixed record for black Americans, who were hit especially hard by the Great Depression. On one hand, many blacks benefited from the New Deal's relief and public employment programs. Blacks received a disproportionate share of the millions of jobs administered by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), for example. On the other hand, some New Deal programs perpetuated racial discrimination patterns and harmed blacks economically. The codes adopted by the National Recovery Administration, for instance, forced the shutdown of small black businesses and codified lower wages for blacks than for whites. Many black activists asserted that the tangible benefits for black Americans were few.

The following viewpoint is by Robert C. Weaver, an adviser on Negro Affairs for the Department of the Interior and one of several blacks appointed to important government posts in the Roosevelt administration. In an article first published in Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life in July 1935, Weaver defends the New Deal, arguing that its various programs have provided much assistance to blacks. He acknowledges difficulties in the execution of some New Deal programs but concludes that black Americans have in general benefited from them.

After Roosevelt's death Weaver taught at Columbia and New York universities and wrote several books, including The Negro Ghetto. In 1966 he became the first black American appointed to a U.S. presidential cabinet when Lyndon Johnson named him secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

It is impossible to discuss intelligently the New Deal and the Negro without considering the status of the Negro prior to the advent of the Recovery Program. The present economic position of the colored citizen was not created by recent legislation alone. Rather, it is the result of the impact of a new program upon an economic and social situation.

Much has been said recently about the occupational distribution of Negroes. Over a half of the gainfully employed colored Americans are concentrated in domestic service and farming. The workers in these two pursuits are the most casual and unstable in the modern economic world. This follows from the fact that neither of them requires any great capital outlay to buy necessary equipment. Thus when there is a decline in trade, the unemployment of workers in these fields does not necessitate idle plants, large depreciation costs, or mounting overhead charges. In such a situation, the employer has every incentive to dismiss his workers; thus, these two classes are fired early in a depression.

The domestic worker has loomed large among the unemployed since the beginning of the current trade decline. This situation has persisted throughout the depression and is reflected in the relief figures for urban communities where 20 per cent of the employables on relief were formerly attached to personal and domestic service. Among Negroes the relative number of domestics and servants on relief is even greater.

In selected cities, 43.4 per cent of the Negroes on relief May 1, 1934, were usually employed as domestics. The demand for servants is a derived one; it is dependent upon the income and employment of other persons in the community. Thus, domestics are among the last rehired in a period of recovery.

The new works program of the Federal Government will attack this problem of the domestic worker from two angles. Insofar as it accelerates recovery by restoring incomes, it will tend to increase the demand for servants. More important, however, will be its creation of direct employment opportunities for all occupational classes of those on relief.

Although it is regrettable that the economic depression has led to the unemployment of so many Negroes and has threatened the
creation of a large segment of the Negro population as a chronic relief load, one is forced to admit that Federal relief has been a godsend to the unemployed. The number of unemployed in this country was growing in 1933. According to the statistics of the American Federation of Labor, the number of unemployed increased from 3,216,000 in January 1930 to 13,689,000 in March 1933. In November 1934 the number was about 10,500,000 and although there are no comparable current data available, estimates indicate that current unemployment is less than that of last November. Local relief monies were shrinking; and need and starvation were facing those unable to find an opportunity to work. A Federal relief program was the only possible aid in this situation. Insofar as the Negro was greatly victimized by the economic developments, he was in a position to benefit from a program which provided adequate funds for relief.

![Image of a roadside camp with text: The harsh living conditions faced by many black sharecroppers and migrant agricultural workers in the South are depicted in this 1939 photograph of a Missouri roadside camp.]

It is admitted that there were many abuses under the relief setup. Such situations should be brought to light and fought. In the case of Negroes, these abuses undoubtedly existed and do exist. We should extend every effort to uncover and correct them. We can admit that we have gained from the relief program and still fight to receive greater and more equitable benefits from it.

The recent depression has been extremely severe in its effects upon the South. The rural Negro—poor before the period of trade decline—was rendered even more needy after 1929. Many tenants found it impossible to obtain a contract for a crop, and scores of Negro farm owners lost their properties. The displacement of Negro tenants (as was the case for whites) began before, and grew throughout the depression. Thus, at the time of the announcement of the New Deal, there were many families without arrangements for a crop—an appreciable number without shelter. The following summary of conditions in one county of a southern state will serve as an illustration. In Greene County, North Carolina (where the population in 1930 was 18,656 divided almost equally between whites and Negroes) the FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration] survey reported data as of January 1934 relative to the period of displacement of families. This material shows that for this county, displacement of tenants was most severe in 1931-1932.

The Negro Farmer

The problems facing the Negro farmer of the South are not new. They have been accentuated by the crop reduction program. They are, for the most part, problems of a system and their resistance to reform is as old as the system. This was well illustrated by the abuses in the administration of the Federal feed, seed, and fertilizer laws in 1928-1929. These abuses were of the same nature as those which confront the AAA [Agricultural Adjustment Administration] in its dealings with Negro tenants.

The southern farm tenant is in such a position that he cannot receive any appreciable gains from a program until steps are taken to change his position of absolute economic dependence upon the landlord. Until some effective measure for rehabilitating him is discovered, there is no hope. The new program for land utilization, rural rehabilitation, and spreading land ownership may be able to effect such a change. Insofar as it takes a step in that direction, it will be advantageous to the Negro farmer. The degree to which it aids him will depend upon the temper of its administration and the extent to which it is able to break away from the status quo.

In listing some of the gains which have accrued to Negroes under the New Deal, there will be a discussion of three lines of activity: housing, employment, and emergency education. These are chosen for discussion because each is significant in itself, and all represent a definite break from the status quo in governmental activity, method, and policy. They do not give a complete picture; but rather, supply interesting examples of what is, and can be, done for Negroes.
The Housing Division of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works has planned 60 Federal housing projects to be under construction by December 31, 1935. Of these, 28 are to be developed in Negro slum areas and will be tenanted predominantly or wholly by Negroes. Eight additional projects will provide for an appreciable degree of Negro occupancy. These 36 projects will afford approximately 74,664 rooms and should offer accommodations for about 23,000 low income colored families. The estimated total cost of these housing developments will be $64,428,000, and they represent about 29 per cent of the funds devoted to Federal slum clearance developments under the present allotments.

A Fair Chance

Interior secretary Harold L. Ickes appointed a number of blacks to his department and was one of the chief New Deal supporters of black civil rights. His address to the twenty-seventh annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was printed in the organization’s journal The Crisis in August 1936.

Negroes are demanding that the ideals and principles upon which the Nation was founded shall be translated into action, and made to apply to themselves as well as to other citizens. They are not asking the Government to coddle them nor to direct their activities, but they do want the Government to assure them a fair chance and an equal opportunity in their desire to attain a fuller life.

Your Government at the present time is not insensitive to this plea, for it comports with its own conception of its responsibility. It is attempting to build a new social order and to set up higher ideals for all of its citizens. In helping the common man to achieve a life that is more worthwhile, this Administration is seeking the greatest good for the greatest number of the people.

Projects in Negro areas have been announced in seven cities: Atlanta, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Montgomery, Chicago, and Nashville. These will cost about $33,232,000 and will contain about 20,000 rooms. Two of these projects, the University development at Atlanta, and the Thurman Street development in Montgomery, are under construction. These are among the earliest Federal housing projects to be initiated by the PWA [Public Works Administration].

After a series of conferences and a period of experience under the PWA, it was decided to include a clause in PWA housing contracts requiring the payment to Negro mechanics of a given percentage of the payroll going to skilled workers. The first project to be affected by such a contractual clause was the Techwood development in Atlanta, Georgia. On this project, most of the labor employed on demolition was composed of unskilled Negro workers. About 90 per cent of the unskilled workers employed laying the foundation for the Techwood project were Negroes, and, for the first two-month construction period, February and March, 12.7 per cent of the wages paid skilled workers was earned by Negro artisans. . . .

Under the educational program of the FERA, out of a total of 17,879 teachers employed in 13 southern states, 5,476 or 30.6 per cent were Negro. Out of a total of 570,794 enrolled in emergency classes, 217,000 or 38 per cent were Negro. Out of a total of $886,300 expended in a month (either February or March 1935) for the program, Negroes received $231,320 or 26.1 per cent. These southern states in which 26.1 per cent of all emergency salaries were paid to Negro teachers, ordinarily allot only 11.7 per cent of all public school salaries to Negro teachers. The situation may be summarized as follows: Six of the 13 states are spending for Negro salaries a proportion of their emergency education funds larger than the percentage of Negroes in those states. The area as a whole is spending for Negro salaries a proportion of its funds slightly in excess of the percentage of Negroes in the population. This development is an example of Government activity breaking away from the status quo in race relations.

There is one Government expenditure in education in reference to which there has been general agreement that equity has been established. That is the FERA college scholarship program. Each college or university not operated for profit, received $20 monthly per student as aid for 12 per cent of its college enrollment. Negro and white institutions have benefited alike under this program.

The New Deal

In the execution of some phases of the Recovery Program, there have been difficulties, and the maximum results have not been received by the Negroes. But, given the economic situation of 1932, the New Deal has been more helpful than harmful to Negroes. We had unemployment in 1932. Jobs were being lost by Negroes, and they were in need. Many would have starved had there been no Federal relief program. As undesirable as is the large relief load among Negroes, the FERA has meant much to them. In most of the New Deal setups, there has been some Negro representation by competent Negroes. The Department of the Interior and the PWA have appointed some fifteen Negroes to jobs of responsibility which pay good salaries. These persons have secretarial and clerical staffs attached to their offices. In addition to these new
jobs, there are the colored messengers, who number around 100, and the elevator operators for the Government buildings, of whom there are several hundred. This is not, of course, adequate representation; but it represents a step in the desired direction and is greater recognition than has been given Negroes in the Federal Government during the last 20 years. Or again, in the Nashville housing project, a Negro architectural firm is a consultant; for the Southwest Side housing project in Chicago, a Negro is an associate architect. One of the proposed projects will have two Negro principal architects, a Negro consultant architect, and a technical staff of about six Negro technicians. In other cities competent colored architects will be used to design housing projects.

This analysis is intended to indicate some advantages accruing to the Negro under the Recovery Program, and to point out that the New Deal, insofar as it represents an extension of governmental activity into the economic sphere, is a departure which can do much to reach the Negro citizens. In many instances it has availed itself of these opportunities. An intelligent appraisal of its operation is necessary to assure greater benefits to colored citizens.

**VIEWPOINT 6**

"On every hand the New Deal has used slogans for the same raw deal [for Negro workers]."

**The New Deal Has Not Aided Blacks**

John Davis (1905-1973)

One of the major political shifts of the 1930s occurred among black Americans. Traditionally supportive of the Republican party since the Civil War, in 1936 almost three out of four black voters supported President Roosevelt. Roosevelt's economic relief and public employment programs had provided work and relief for many blacks. Administration officials such as Harold L. Ickes and Harry Hopkins appointed blacks to high government posts and advocated racial integration. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was a strong public supporter of black civil rights. All these factors contributed to black political support.

The New Deal, however, also received much harsh criticism from black intellectuals. They argued that many of its programs did little to directly counter the segregation and discrimination black Americans still faced. One of the New Deal's critics was black lawyer and writer John Davis. Davis organized the Joint Committee on National Recovery in 1933 to combat what it viewed as unfair and discriminatory practices permitted by the National Recovery Administration. The NRA was established in 1935 to draw up industry codes that set national standards for production, wages, and prices. Many of these codes preserved racially discriminatory business practices. Davis's organization

filed briefs and conducted public hearings in a mostly futile attempt to persuade the NRA to change these practices. In the following viewpoint, taken from a 1935 article in The Crisis, Davis argues that many of the programs of the New Deal were actually harmful to black Americans.

It is highly important for the Negro citizen of America to take inventory of the gains and losses which have come to him under the "New Deal." The Roosevelt administration has now had two years in which to unfold itself. Its portents are reasonably clear to anyone who seriously studies the varied activities of its recovery program. We can now state with reasonable certainty what the "New Deal" means for the Negro.

At once the most striking and irrefutable indication of the effect of the New Deal on the Negro can be gleaned from relief figures furnished by the government itself. In October, 1933, six months after the present administration took office, 2,117,000 Negroes were in families receiving relief in the United States. These represented 17.8 per cent of the total Negro population as of the 1930 census. In January, 1935, after nearly two years of recovery measures, 3,500,000 Negroes were in families receiving relief, or 29 per cent of our 1930 population. Certainly only a slight portion of the large increase in the number of impoverished Negro families can be explained away by the charitable, on the grounds that relief administration has become more humane. As a matter of fact federal relief officials themselves admit that grave abuses exist in the administration of rural relief to Negroes. And this is reliably borne out by the disproportionate increase in the number of urban Negro families on relief to the number of rural Negro families on relief. Thus the increase in the number of Negroes in relief families is an accurate indication of the deepening of the economic crisis for black America.

The National Recovery Administration

The promise of NRA to bring higher wages and increased employment to industrial workers has glimmered away. In the code-making process occupational and geographical differentials at first were used as devices to exclude from the operation of minimum wages and maximum hours the bulk of the Negro workers. Later, clauses basing code wage rates on the previously existing wage differential between Negro and white workers tended to continue the inferior status of the Negro. For the particular firms, for whom none of these devices served as an effective means of keeping down Negro wages, there is an easy way out through the securing of an exemption specifically relating to the Negro worker in the plant. Such exemptions are becoming more numerous as time goes on. Thus from the beginning relatively few Negro workers were even theoretically covered by NRA labor provisions.

Discrimination in New Deal Programs

Sociologist Guy Johnson of the University of North Carolina wrote an article for Social Forces (October 1934). It detailed the racial obstacles blacks faced in the American South, which the New Deal had done little to change.

Even in the administration of federal relief, the Civil Works program, the A.A.A. [Agricultural Adjustment Administration], etc., there has been, particularly in the lower South, a tendency to perpetuate the existing inequalities. Negro tenants received pitifully little of the crop reduction money last fall. Landlords quite generally took charge of the checks and applied them to back debts of the tenants. Furthermore, many landlords are known to have "understandings" with local relief administrators to prevent the "demoralization" of their Negro labor, and it is reported that some go so far as to charge to their tenants' accounts all food and other supplies furnished by the relief office. The director of relief in a southern seaboard city remarked not long ago, "I don't like this fixing of a wage scale for work relief. Why, the negroes in this town are getting so spoiled working on these relief jobs at thirty cents an hour that they won't work on the docks for fifty cents a day like they did last year." In allotting C.W.A. [Civil Works Administration] jobs to unemployment offices throughout the South ignored the Negro skilled worker almost as effectively as if he did not exist. In one tobacco center, for example, 13 per cent of the white C.W.A. workers received the skilled rates of pay, while only 1.2 per cent of the Negro workers received such pay. In another industrial city, 15 per cent of the whites on C.W.A. pay rolls received skilled rates, but not one Negro did so. If skilled Negroes worked, they worked at the unskilled rates.

But employers did not have to rely on the code-making process. The Negro worker not already discriminated against through code provisions had many other gauntlets to run. The question of importance to him as to all workers was, "as a result of all of NRA's maneuvers will I be able to buy more?" The answer has been "No." A worker cannot eat a wage rate. To determine what this wage rate means to him we must determine a number of other factors. Thus rates for longshoremen seem relatively high.
but when we realize that the average amount of work a long-
shoreman receives during the year is from ten to fifteen weeks,
the wage rate loses much of its significance. When we add to that
fact the increase in the cost of living—as high as 40 per cent in
many cases—the wage rate becomes even more chimerical. For
other groups of industrial workers increases in cost of living, cou-
pled with the part time and irregular nature of the work, make
the results of NRA negligible. In highly mechanized industries
speed-up and stretch-out nullify the promised result of NRA to
bring increased employment through shorter hours. For the
workers are now producing more in their shorter work periods
than in the longer periods before NRA. There is less employment.
The first sufferer from fewer jobs is the Negro worker. Finally the
complete break-down of compliance machinery in the South has
cancelled the last minute advantage to Negro workers which
NRA’s enthusiasts may have claimed.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration has used cruder
methods in enforcing poverty on the Negro farm population. It
has made violations of the rights of tenants under crop reduction
contracts easy; it has rendered enforcement of these rights impos-
sible. The reduction of the acreage under cultivation through the
government rental agreement rendered unnecessary large
numbers of tenants and farm laborers. Although the contract with
the government provided that the land owner should not reduce the
number of his tenants, he did so. The federal courts have now re-
 fused to allow tenants to enjoin such evictions. Faced with this
Dred Scott decision against farm tenants, the AAA has remained
discreetly silent. Farm laborers are now jobless by the hundreds
of thousands, the conservative government estimate of the de-
cline in agricultural employment for the year 1934 alone being a
quarter of a million. The larger portion of these are unskilled
Negro agricultural workers—now without income and unable to
secure work or relief.

But the unemployment and tenant evictions occasioned by the
crop reduction policies of the AAA is not all. For the tenants and
sharecroppers who were retained on the plantations the govern-
ment’s agricultural program meant reduced income. Wholesale
fraud on tenants in the payment of parity checks occurred. Ten-
ants complaining to the Department of Agriculture in Wash-
ington have their letters referred back to the locality in which they
live and trouble of serious nature often results. Even when this
does not happen, the tenant fails to get his check. The remainder
of the land he tills on shares with his landlord brings him only
the most meagre necessities during the crop season varying from
three to five months. The rest of the period for him and his family
is one of “root hog or die.”

The past year has seen an extension of poverty even to the
small percentage (a little more than 20 per cent) of Negro farmers
who own their own land. For them compulsory reduction of
acreage for cotton and tobacco crops, with the quantum of such
reduction controlled and regulated by local boards on which they
have no representation, has meant drastic reduction of their
already low income. Wholesale confiscation of the income of the
Negro cotton and tobacco farmer is being made by prejudiced
local boards in the South under the very nose of the federal gov-
ernment. In the wake of such confiscation has come a tremendous
increase in land tenancy as a result of foreclosures on Negroid
owned farm properties.

Nor has the vast public works program, designed to give in-
creased employment to workers in the building trades, been free
from prejudice. State officials in the South are in many cases in
open rebellion against the ruling of PWA [Public Works Admin-
istration] that the same wage scales must be paid to Negro and
white labor. Compliance with this paper ruling is enforced in
only rare cases. The majority of the instances of violation of this
rule are unremedied. Only unskilled work is given Negroes on
public works projects in most instances. And even here discrimi-
nation in employment is notorious. Such is bound to be the case
when we realize that there are only a handful of investigators
available to seek enforcement.

Public Works Employment

Recently a move has been made by Negro officials in the ad-
ministration to effect larger employment of Negro skilled and un-
skilled workers on public works projects by specifying that fail-
ure of a contractor to pay a certain percentage of his payroll to
Negro artisans will be evidence of racial discrimination. Without
doubting the good intentions of the sponsors of this ingenious
scheme, it must nevertheless be pointed out that it fails to meet
the problem in a number of vital particulars. It has yet to face a
test in the courts, even if one is willing to suppose that PWA high
officials will bring it to a test. Percentages thus far experimented
with are far too low and the number of such experiments far too
few to make an effective dent in the unemployment conditions of
Negro construction industry workers. Moreover the scheme gives
aid and comfort to employer-advocates of strike-breaking and the
open shop; and, while offering, perhaps, some temporary relief to
a few hundred Negro workers, it establishes a dangerous preced-
ent which throws back the labor movement and the organiza-
tion of Negro workers to a considerable degree. The scheme,
whatever its Negro sponsors may hope to the contrary, becomes therefore only another excuse for their white superiors maintaining a "do-nothing" policy with regard to discrimination against Negroes in the Public Works Administration.

No Relief from Racism

Future United Nations diplomat and Nobel prize winner Ralph J. Bunche was a political science professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C., when he wrote a critical evaluation of the New Deal for the January 1936 issue of Journal of Negro Education.

Striking at no fundamental social conditions, the New Deal at best can only fix the disadvantages, the differentials, the discriminations, under which the Negro population has labored all along. The traditional racial stereotypes—which have been inherited from the master-slave tradition and which have been employed by the ruling class of large land-holders in the South and Industrialists in the North to give effective expression to their determination to keep the Negro in a servile condition and as a profitable labor supply—remain, and are indeed, often heightened by the New Deal.

The Negro has no pleasanter outlook in the long-term social planning ventures of the new administration. Planning for subsistence homesteads for industrially stranded workers has been muddled enough even without consideration of the problem of integrating Negroes into such plans. Subsistence Homestead projects are overburdened with profit-seeking prices for the homesteads and foredoomed to failure by the lack of planning for adequate and permanent incomes for prospective homesteaders.

In callous disregard of the interdiction in the Constitution of the United States against use of federal funds for projects which discriminate against applicants solely on the ground of color, subsistence homesteads have been planned on a strictly "lily-white" basis. The more than 200 Negro applicants for the first project at Arthurdale, West Virginia, were not even considered, Mr. Bushrod Grimes (then in charge of the project) announcing that the project was to be open only to "native white stock." As far north as Dayton, Ohio, where state laws prohibit any type of segregation against Negroes, the federal government has extended its "lily-white" policy. Recently it has established two Jim-Crow projects for Negroes. Thus the new administration seeks in its program of social planning to perpetuate ghettos of Negroes for fifty years to come.

An even more blatant example of this policy of "lily-white" reconstruction is apparent in the planning of the model town of Norris, Tennessee, by the Tennessee Valley Authority. This town of 450 model homes is intended for the permanent workers on Norris Dam. The homes are rented by the federal government, which at all times maintains title to the land and dwellings and has complete control of the town management. Yet officials at TVA openly admit that no Negroes are allowed at Norris.

TVA has other objectionable features. While Negro employment now approaches an equitable proportion of total employment, the payroll of Negro workers remains disproportionately lower than that of whites. While the government has maintained a trade school to train workers on the project, no Negro trainees have been admitted. Nor have any meaningful plans matured for the future of the several thousand Negro workers who in another year or so will be left without employment, following completion of work on the dams being built by TVA.

None of the officials of TVA seems to have the remotest idea of how Negroes in the Tennessee Valley will be able to buy the cheap electricity which TVA is designed to produce. They admit that standards of living of the Negro population are low, that the introduction of industry into the Valley is at present only a nebulous dream, that even if this eventuates there is no assurance that Negro employment will result. The fairest summary that can be made of TVA is that for a year or so it has furnished bread to a few thousand Negro workers. Beyond that everything is conjecture which is most unpleasant because of the utter planlessness of those in charge of the project.

Recovery legislation of the present session of Congress reveals the same fatal flaws which have been noted in the operation of previous recovery ventures. Thus, for example, instead of genuine unemployment insurance we have the leaders of the administration proposing to exclude from their plans domestic and agricultural workers, in which classes are to be found 15 out of every 23 Negro workers. On every hand the New Deal has used slogans for the same raw deal.

The sharpening of the crisis for Negroes has not found them unresponsive. Two years of increasing hardship has seen strange movements among the masses. In Chicago, New York, Washington and Baltimore the struggle for jobs has given rise to action on the part of a number of groups seeking to boycott white employers who refuse to employ Negroes. "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns are springing up everywhere. . . . And proposals for a 49th State are being seriously considered by various groups.

Interracial Approaches

In sharp contrast with these strictly racial approaches to the problem have been a number of interracial approaches. Increas-
ing numbers of unemployed groups have been organized under radical leadership and have picketed relief stations for bread. Sharecroppers unions, under Socialist leadership in Arkansas, have shaken America into a consciousness of the growing resentment of southern farm tenants and the joint determination of the Negro and white tenants to do something about their intolerable condition.

In every major strike in this country Negro union members have fought with their white fellow workers in a struggle for economic survival. The bodies of ten Negro strikers killed in such strike struggles offer mute testimony to this fact. Even the vicious policies of the leaders of the A. F. of L. [American Federation of Labor] in discrimination against Negro workers is breaking down under the pressure for solidarity from the ranks of whites.

This heightening of spirit among all elements of black America and the seriousness of the crisis for them make doubly necessary the consideration of the social and economic condition of the Negro at this time. It was a realization of these conditions which gave rise to the proposals to hold a national conference on the economic status of Negroes under the New Deal at Howard University in Washington, D.C., on May 18, 19, and 20. At this conference, sponsored by the Social Science Division of Howard University and the Joint Committee on National Recovery, a candid and intelligent survey of the social and economic condition of the Negro will be made. Unlike most conferences it will not be a talk-fest. For months nationally known economists and other technicians have been working on papers to be presented. Unlike other conferences it will not be a one-sided affair. Ample opportunity will be afforded for high government officials to present their views of the "New Deal." Others not connected with the government, including representatives of radical political parties, will also appear to present their conclusions. Not the least important phase will be the appearance on the platform of Negro workers and farmers themselves to offer their own experience under the New Deal. Out of such a conference can and will come a clear-cut analysis of the problems faced by Negroes and the nation.

But a word of caution ought to be expressed with regard to this significant conference. In the final analysis it cannot and does not claim to be representative of the mass opinion of Negro citizens in America. All it can claim for itself is that it will bring together on a non-representative basis well informed Negro and white technicians to discuss the momentous problem it has chosen as its topic. It can furnish a base for action for any organization which chooses to avail itself of the information developed by it. It cannot act itself.

Thus looking beyond such a conference one cannot fail to hope
the animals through the winter. They were not out for big money, but reveled in the freedom and thrill they experienced rounding up cattle, of cowboy life out on the plains. The Hidatsas offer proof that sustainable use of the land does not have to mean forswearing all the pleasures that come with economic development, as long as people can content themselves with small monetary rewards and resist the urge to overstock.  

DARK DAYS

As calamities go, the great cattle bust was just one of a number of disasters, big and small, that put an end to the dreams of those who ignored the plains as one vast field of opportunity. The calamities may have appeared natural but were, in fact, the result of a complex interaction between an economic culture unmindful of limits and a volatile physical environment prone to drought, winds, and storms.

Most students of American history are aware of the Dust Bowl, but few learn of the 1890s drought. And yet, in terms of its social consequences, the event may have caused even more suffering and hardship than the well-known 1930s disaster. The groundwork for the calamity was laid between 1878 and 1887, when the same wet weather that gave rise to the beef bonanza also sent farmers from the eastern part of the country out to plains to plant wheat, causing the population in some areas to explode. The population of the western third of Kansas alone rose from 38,000 people in 1885 to 139,000 people in 1887. Optimism ruled the day as railroads and other western boosters, with prevailing scientific theory on their side, promoted the catch phrase "rain follows the plow."

By 1887, the past tense no longer applied with respect to drought. Wheat yields tumbled in response to the dry weather, which extended into the following decade. Widespread reports of drought-induced starvation and malnutrition—relatively minor problems in the 1930s Dust Bowl—began to file in, with some talking of "Anderson fare," a reference to the South's brutal Civil War prison, Andersonville. In Miner County, South Dakota, 2,500 people faced death from starvation, with corn averaging just a meager two to three bushels per acre. Unable to survive, many simply walked off the land. Some areas experienced population losses of half to three-quarters. Suddenly pessimism replaced optimism, with one songwriter telling of "starvin' to death on my government claim." The government, under the provisions of the Homestead Act (1862), sought to open the Great Plains by allowing anyone who settled 160 acres and remained for five years to become its rightful owner. In the late nineteenth century, however, they were more likely to starve first.  

To deal with the arid conditions, many farmers tried dryland farming. Centered on the use of drought-resistant grain crops, deep plowing, quick cultivation after a period of rain, and other moisture-conserving measures, the technique succeeded, with the help of high wheat prices, in making the years between 1909 and 1914 a boom period for Great Plains farmers. The good times continued as gasoline-powered mowers and the use of new disk plows, which reduced the labor involved. More farmers, however, turned to plant wheat, and the government sought to attract more to the plains. When World War I ended, the Allied cause and the failure of the Homestead Act to provide the millions of acres of grass that had been promised by the government led to the destruction of the grassland.

Although most people associate the 1890s, leading to dust storms, with the great plains, few realize that the same drought conditions that led to the Dust Bowl also led to the Great Plains drought of the 1880s. The difference was that in the 1880s, people were more aware of the dangers of overgrazing and took steps to prevent it. In the 1890s, however, people were more focused on the promise of quick profits and ignored the long-term consequences of their actions.
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d dryland farming. Cel lowing, quick cultivation sures, the technique such the years between 1909 good times continued as gasoline-powered machines—tractors, combines, and trucks—dramatically reduced the labor involved in planting wheat. The one-way disk plow, invented in 1926, doubled the amount of sod a farmer could break in a day. While the old moldboard plows (a "moldboard" being a curved plate that forced the soil off to one side) sliced through the sod and turned it over in one unbroken mass, the new disk plows, with their multiple plates, pulverized the soil, increasing water absorption. The huge strides in mechanization eventually gave rise to "suitcase farmers," bankers, teachers, and others who purchased equipment, drove it out to plant wheat, and then returned home before venturing back in the spring to reap their rewards. If their harvests coincided with an uptick in the price of grain, those rewards could be substantial indeed.46

When World War I began, the plains farmer was in the perfect position to aid the Allied cause and to plow up millions of acres of grass in the process. Eleven million acres of grass in Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas was destroyed between 1914 and 1919. Wartime demand for wheat drove farmers to plow up more grass, but it also worked to draw the plains farmer ever more closely into the international market economy. Life on the plains became tied to economic imperatives in distant lands, as the soil wealth of the plains was creamed off to feed people across the globe.
But just as important, natural wealth from outside the country was brought to bear on plains agriculture, as U.S. scientists scoured the earth for a species of wheat that would flourish in the arid West. Turning to those parts of Asia that closely resembled the American grasslands, Frank Meyer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture returned with 2,500 new varieties of plants between 1905 and 1918. A Canadian scientist, Charles Saunders, then used some of the Russian wheat species to develop Marquis, one of the two varieties of wheat that account for the bulk of the crop planted on the plains today. It was not just wheat, but Marquis wheat that helped America win the war—a development that, it must be said, also cost the plains its grass.47

Gone by 1935 was the native grass that once covered 33 million acres in the heart of what became the Dust Bowl region. When drought conditions—a regular and predictable aspect of life on the plains—emerged once again in the 1930s, the dried-out soil became even more prone to wind erosion. Nineteen thirty-five was the worst year for dust storms; the darkest day in that dark year was April 14, 1935, Black Sunday. From Colorado to Washington, DC, the skies turned black and the sand blew in, blasting the paint from houses, insinuating itself through cracks and keyholes, piling up in front yards. The air came loaded with both dust and rationalization. In Dalhart, Texas, John McCarty, a newspaper editor incensed by the eastern media's efforts to pin the Dust Bowl label on the region, blamed the tragedy on drought and "conditions beyond their [the farmers'] control." Franklin Roosevelt, whose New Deal administration intervened to buttress farming in the disaster-prone plains—offering federal money for relief as well as loans to finance rebuilding—also blamed natural forces beyond anyone's control. Drought was necessary but hardly sufficient to bring on the calamity. It also took an economic culture that viewed the land as capital, a society in which the search for profits guided relations with the earth.48

In the last analysis the Dust Bowl amounted to a failure on the part of farmers to adapt to the arid ecological conditions present on the southern plains. When Roosevelt stepped in with federal money for relief and rehabilitation, he caused farmers to think, correctly as it turned out, that the government would intervene in future droughts, giving them an incentive to stay put. Roosevelt thus divided up the potential threat of environmental tragedy in this region and proceeded to share it with taxpayers all across the nation. The risk of drought was divorced from the place in which it occurred, spread out for each and every American to bear, Uncle Sam defusing the harmful effects of natural calamity by shunting their costs elsewhere. It amounted to one huge exercise in risk sharing, one monstrous gift from the North and South to the West. Without it, life on the plains as we know it today would be impossible.

CONCLUSION

What does the history of this unforgiving land have to teach us? First, it provides a new appreciation for the hardships faced by the Indians as they were driven (during the first half of the nine)}

being relative freedom from hunger one would freeze to death. When the South to the West, however, volatile weather where survival co

The second lesson is this: To expect to such extreme weather is a was one thing in the warm and wheat in the arid West, where di

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(during the first half of the nineteenth century) across the Mississippi River to
make way for cotton plantations. The South’s lush landscape assured all human
beings relative freedom from hunger; its mild climate virtually guaranteed that no
one would freeze to death. When the U.S. government removed the Indians from
the South to the West, however, they forced them into an arid region full of
volatile weather where survival could no longer be taken for granted.

The second lesson is this: To engage in economic specialization in a place sub-
ject to such extreme weather is a risky enterprise. Specializing in cotton farming
was one thing in the warm and bountiful South. Pursuing buffaloes or raising
wheat in the arid West, where drought could descend at the worst possible mo-
ment and where no spring fish runs existed to fall back on, was something yet
again. As a general rule, a culture’s ability to respond and adapt to environmen-
tal change is inversely proportional to the degree to which it specializes. The more
single-minded in pursuit of one activity, be it buffalo hunting or wheat farming,
the less likely it is to be able to cope with sudden shifts in weather and their con-
sequences on the ground. Only the U.S. government’s willingness to absorb and
redistribute the risks of life out on the plains has allowed American farmers the
liberty to rely solely on wheat. Take away the subsidies and relief aid and let the
Kansas farmer bear the full weight of living in this arid land, and suddenly what
now seems like rugged individualism becomes revealed as daredevilry in disguise.