

A New Deal for African Americans?



 **Mission:** to analyse + evaluate sources to understand how significant the New Deal was for African Americans.



How significant was the New Deal for African Americans, 1933 - 1941 ?

The following collection of sources will help you understand how the New Deal helped and also hindered the lives of Black Americans. The New Deal was based on the three areas; RELIEF (immediate help) RECOVERY (lasting economic improvement) and REFORM (a change of behaviour / beliefs from what had existed before). Remember, all of this took place against the backdrop of the ongoing campaign for civil rights and the challenge to racial discrimination that was baked into the 'American dream'.

These sources focus on the 6 areas outlined in the boxes below - note many of these will overlap.

Civil
Rights

Job
Creation

Working
Conditions

Rural
South

Urban
North

Black
Leadership

African Americans benefited from many of Roosevelt's New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration employing over 300,000 African Americans. The Civilian Conservation Corp employing over 300,000 African Americans. The Public Works Administration set quotas for the number of African Americans that had to be hired for construction jobs. New Deal education programs also taught more than 1 million African Americans to read and write. More skilled and educated African Americans were hired as engineers, librarians, lawyers, and architects under New Deal programs. Advancements like these shifted black voting habits towards the Democratic Party and away from the Republicans for the first time since Abraham Lincoln.

Study.com: [Article](#)

A



Black sharecroppers in the South - 1930s

'Judged from the standards of today, of course, there is much we can criticize about the New Deal era. It did not bring to an end the tremendous injustices that African Americans had to suffer on a day-to-day basis, and some of its activities, such as the work of the Federal Housing Administration, served to build rather than break down the walls of segregation that separated black from white. Yet as Mary McLeod Bethune once noted, the Roosevelt era represented "the first time in their history" that African Americans felt that they could communicate their grievances to their government with the "expectancy of sympathetic understanding and interpretation." Indeed, it was during the New Deal, that the silent, invisible hand of racism was fully exposed as a national issue; as a problem that at the very least needed to be recognized; as something the country could no longer pretend did not exist.'

FDRInstitute.org

C



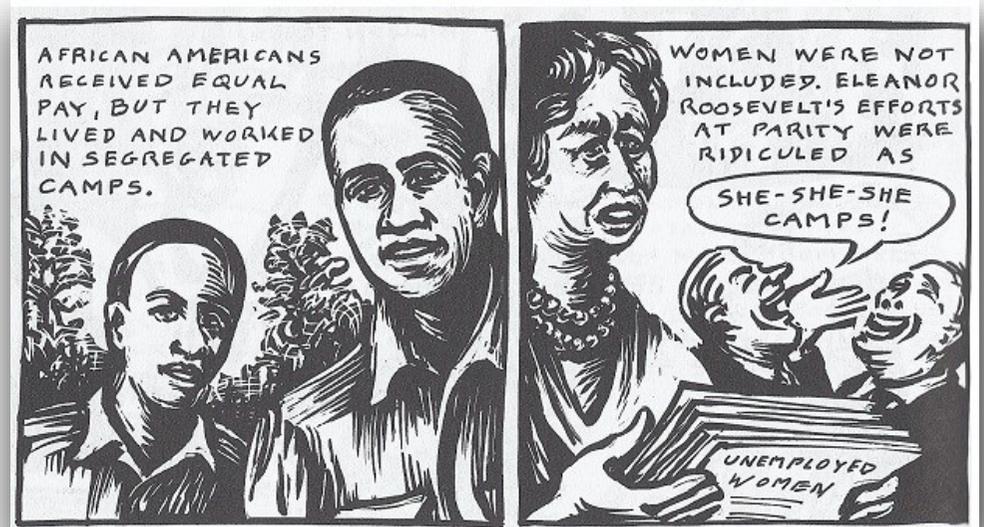
D

Enrollees in one of the New Deal's first jobs programs, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), study radio code at a camp in Kane, Pennsylvania, 1933.

The CCC was created to employ young single men from ages 18 to 25 on outdoor conservation projects. Enrollees had to be physically fit and come from families that were on relief and to whom they were willing to send most of their pay. During its nine-year existence, the CCC distributed more than \$2.4 billion in federal funds to employ more than 2.5 million jobless young men (up to 519,000 were enrolled at any one time) who worked in about 3,000 camps. According to the Texas Almanac, the CCC was of very limited assistance to Black families because of local bigotry (racism) and national CCC leaders' political concerns. Though CCC rules forbade discrimination based on race, color or creed, the local relief boards often refused to enroll Blacks, particularly in the South. When they were enrolled, Blacks were almost always placed in segregated camps, not only in the South, but all over the country.

Atlanta Black Star.

F



Comicmix.com - published 2011.

E

Northern New Deal work-relief programs were open to people of all races. Millions of African Americans were hired for projects created by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), Civil Works Administration (CWA), Works Progress Administration (WPA), and public works paid for by the Public Works Administration (PWA). Others found jobs in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and other departments, as the regular employment of African Americans in federal line agencies tripled during the New Deal. And the public works programs were not all segregated, as often claimed. Blacks frequently worked alongside whites.

Livingnewdeal.org: [Article](#)

G

The President's many enemies attacked Mrs. Roosevelt's actions, and spread vicious rumours' about her friendships with African Americans. Even FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover is reported to have thought she had "black blood."

fdr.blog.archives: [Article](#)

H

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration reduced agricultural production by paying farmers subsidies NOT to plant on part of their land and to kill off excess livestock, which in turn reduced crop surplus and effectively raised the value of crops. But since 40 percent of all Black workers made their living as sharecroppers and tenant farmers, the (AAA) reduction hit Blacks hard, according to *Digital History*. White landlords could make more money by leaving land unfarmed than by putting land back into production. As a result, the AAA's policies forced more than 100,000 Blacks off the land in 1933 and 1934.

Atlanta Black Star.

L

"A Norfolk restaurant, obliged to raise its minimum wage under the (New Deal) code -- a wage that had been acceptable to Negro workers -- dismissed them and employed Caucasians (whites) in their place. This newspaper fears that thousands of Negroes, engaged as porters, janitors, elevator men, messengers, drivers and the dike, will be ousted throughout the country by employers who hire Negroes at present because they can get them cheaper."

[Editorial by Jesse O. Thomas, *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life*: Article](#)

K

The New Deal left largely untouched the problems of farmers, sharecroppers, migrants workers in agriculture and among ethnic groups, blacks, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans. The New Deal bypassed black Americans, made only small concessions to the status of women, and did little to improve the general standard of education.

Sean Cashman.
America in the 1920s and 30s.

L



Black Americans, grading beans in a canning plant, Florida, 1937.

Roosevelt's accessibility to African American leaders and the New Deal reforms strengthened black support for the Democratic Party. A number of leaders, members of a so-called "black cabinet," were advisers to Roosevelt. Among them were the educator Mary McLeod Bethune, who served as the National Youth Administration's director of Negro affairs; William H. Hastie, who in 1937 became the first black federal judge; Eugene Jones, executive secretary of the National Urban League and the economist Robert C. Weaver.

Britannica: [Article](#)

M



William Hastie: the first Black federal court judge : 1937.

Mary McLeod Bethune.
National Youth Director for Negro Affairs.



Equally important, the opportunities provided by the New Deal for professional women such as Ellen Woodward to work in higher positions of the federal government was also new. The New Deal's record in placing women in positions of responsibility within government - which includes, among others, Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, the first female cabinet minister in history and **Mary Bethune the African American head of the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration** - would not be matched until the 1960s. Thanks to the efforts of Eleanor Roosevelt and others, then, the New Deal - though not perfect broke new ground for women in America.

www.rooseveltinstitute.org: [Article](#)

R

The Social Security Act of 1935, provided a safety net for millions of workers by guaranteeing them an income after retirement, excluded from coverage about half the workers in the American economy. Among the excluded groups were agricultural (sharecroppers) and domestic workers - job categories traditionally filled by Black workers.

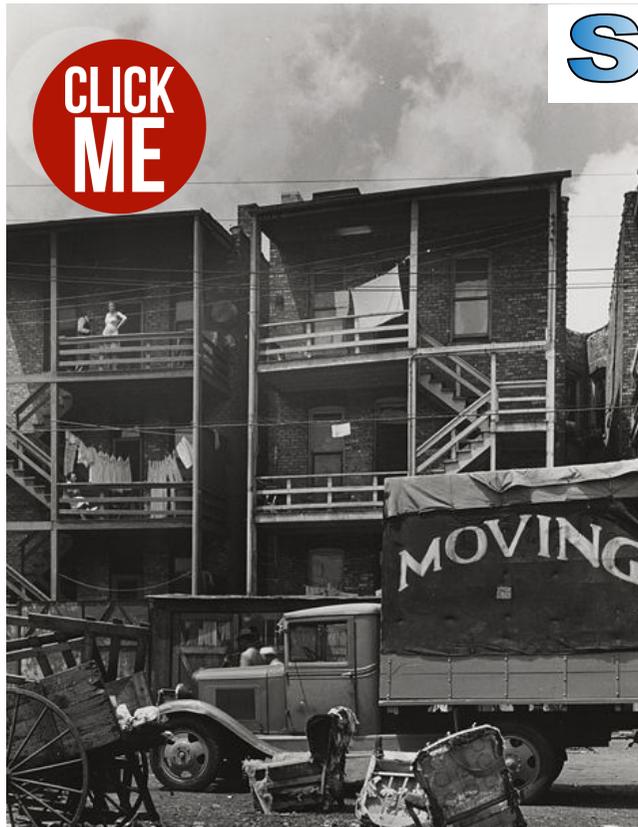
Atlanta Black Star.

P

As we celebrate Black History Month, it is a good time to explore one of Eleanor Roosevelt's most outspoken campaigns. Nothing reveals her commitment more than her efforts to outlaw lynching. The anti-lynching movement was as controversial then as the black lives matter movement is today. There were 28 murders by lawless white mobs in 1933 alone. The victims were often tortured, beaten, burned alive and hanged. Almost no one was arrested or convicted for these crimes. In 1934, Mrs. Roosevelt joined the NAACP and started working with its leader Walter White to help pass anti-lynching laws.

Fdrblog.org: [Article](#)

Q



Chicago - northern USA. Black urban housing.



A tenant farmer watches his crops being destroyed.

One important demographic change underlay the experience of African Americans during the Roosevelt years. The migration of African Americans from the South to the urban North, which began in 1910, continued in the 1930s and accelerated in the 1940s during World War II. As a result, black Americans during the Roosevelt years lived for the most part either in the urban North or in the rural South, although the Depression chased increasingly large numbers of blacks to southern cities as well. In the North, blacks encountered de facto segregation, racism, and discrimination in housing and public services; nevertheless, they were able to vote and had better job opportunities. In the South, blacks were disfranchised (had no voice / vote) , lived under a segregationist regime enforced by violence, and found fewer avenues for escape from crushing poverty.

Article: [Millercenter.org](https://www.millercenter.org)

U



Aid (relief) to African Americans prior to 1933, especially in the South, had been nearly non-existent; the federal help that did come with the New Deal, therefore, was significant. African Americans found significant allies in the administration, from Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to the First Lady herself, Eleanor Roosevelt. Enough blacks, like Mary McLeod Bethune, found themselves in leadership positions that there was even talk of a "black Cabinet" of FDR advisers.

Article: [Millercenter.org](https://www.millercenter.org)

W

- Around 200,000 African Americans gained benefits from the Civilian Conservation Corps and other New Deal agencies.
- Many African Americans benefit from slum clearance and housing projects.
- Many New Deal agencies discriminated against African Americans They either got less work or received lower wages and poorer treatment.
- Roosevelt failed to support anti-lynching laws. He feared that Democrat senators in the southern states would not support him.

Ben Walsh: Modern World History Textbook.

X

The flagship of the New Deal was the National Industrial Recovery Act, passed in June 1933. It authorized the president to issue executive orders establishing some 700 industrial cartels, which restricted output and forced wages and prices above market levels. The minimum wage regulations made it illegal for employers to hire people who weren't worth the minimum because they lacked skills. As a result, some 500,000 blacks, particularly in the South, were estimated to have lost their jobs. Marginal workers, like unskilled blacks, desperately needed an expanding economy to create more jobs. Yet New Deal policies made it harder for employers to hire people. FDR tripled federal taxes between 1933 and 1940. Social Security taxes on payrolls discouraged employers from hiring. New Deal securities laws made it harder for employers to raise money. New Deal antitrust lawsuits harassed some 150 employers and whole industries. Whatever the merits of such policies might have been, it was bizarre to disrupt private sector employment when the median unemployment rate was 17 percent.

[Cato.org: article](https://www.cato.org)

Y

Z



CLICK ME

The lynching of Roosevelt Townes and Robert McDaniels, Mississippi, 1937.

"If I come out for the anti-lynching bill now, they will block every bill I ask Congress to pass the keep America from collapsing. I just can't take the risk."

President FDR: 1934

A1

"There are far-reaching problems still with us for which democracy must find solutions. For example, many millions of Americans still live in habitations which not only fail to provide the physical benefits of modern civilization but breed disease and impair the health of future generations. The menace exists not only in the slum areas of the very large cities, but in many smaller cities as well."

FDR in a speech to Congress in 1937.

A2

Negros swung to Roosevelt because they had been granted relief. They had been hit harder than any other group by the depression and survived largely because f relief cheques . The NYA through negro leader Mary Bethune funnelled funds to thousands of young Negros.

W.E. Leuchtenburg, Franlin D Rooslevlt and the New Deal, 1963.

A3



Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McLeod Bethune at the opening of Midway Hall, one of two residence halls built by the Public Buildings Administration.

A4

Life Magazine Poster: February, 1937.



CLICK ME

A5

The New Deal + African Americans.

 **Task:** to write a one sentence summing up the key point from each source of information.

	The main point or message of the source
A	
B	
C	
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F	
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	The main point or message of the source
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A2	
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