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MACKEY, WARREN CORNELL

THE NEW DEAL; REVOLUTIONARY, EVOLUTIONARY, OR  
CONSERVATIVE: TEACHING CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS IN THE  
SURVEY COURSE

*Middle Tennessee State University*

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THE NEW DEAL;  
REVOLUTIONARY, EVOLUTIONARY, OR CONSERVATIVE:  
TEACHING CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS  
IN THE SURVEY COURSE

Warren Cornell Mackey

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THE NEW DEAL;  
REVOLUTIONARY, EVOLUTIONARY, OR CONSERVATIVE:  
TEACHING CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS  
IN THE SURVEY COURSE

APPROVED:

Graduate Committee

*Ernest Hooper*  
Major Professor

*Fred Colvin*  
Minor Professor

*Charles W. Ball*  
Committee Member

*Donald Schuller*  
Committee Member

*William J. Windham*  
Head of the Department of History

*Robert C. Allen*  
Dean of the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

THE NEW DEAL;  
REVOLUTIONARY, EVOLUTIONARY, OR CONSERVATIVE:  
TEACHING CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS  
IN THE SURVEY COURSE

by Warren Cornell Mackey

In the field of history, as well as other disciplines throughout academia, there is a problem that constantly plagues instructors teaching survey level courses: the problem of equally distinguished historians studying the same topics and using the same basic resource material but coming to completely opposing interpretations in regard to their subjects. It is understandable that a sophomore can be perplexed upon reading one historian who considers the New Deal to have been revolutionary in nature, a second who considers it evolutionary, and yet a third who considers it to have been conservative. This study has sought to provide instructors of history with some strategies for teaching conflicting interpretations.

The history instructor should take great care in identifying and selecting the behavioral objectives that

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he wants the class to accomplish. They should be measurable and stated clearly so that both the student and the teacher may well understand what is expected. Some objectives that may be cited that pertain to the New Deal are: (1) the student shall be able to list the major New Deal legislation passed by Congress to assist the farmers, and (2) the student shall be able to demonstrate an understanding of the New Deal as a historical movement.

Role playing and simulation are two strategies that can be used to teach conflicting interpretations. To demonstrate the problem a student might be assigned the task of acting out a character from each school of thought. The character being portrayed might be a person from the period or a leading exponent from each school of thought. The other class members can be assigned supportive roles like doing research to gather data or for the schools of thought or writing the scripts for the characters.

A last strategy that might be employed in teaching conflicting interpretations is to divide the class into four groups, with three of them assigned the task of defending one of the schools of thought on the New Deal to the fourth group which would serve as a panel of judges.

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In this exercise the instructor might serve as a resource person from whom the groups can receive suggestions or the titles of books.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose of Study

In the field of history, as well as other disciplines throughout academia, there is a problem that constantly plagues instructors teaching survey level courses: the problem of equally distinguished historians studying the same topics and using the same basic resource material but coming to completely opposing interpretations in regard to their subjects. It is understandable that a sophomore can be perplexed upon reading one historian who considers the New Deal to have been revolutionary in nature, a second historian who considers it evolutionary, and yet a third historian who considers it to have been conservative.

The instructor in the survey history course may deal with this paradox in several ways. One may play it down by saying, "that's the way it is." Another may suggest-- or even impose--the "correct" interpretation on the class. It may be, however, that this problem can be the means to help the student develop critical thinking, which is one of the goals for many survey courses.

The American survey history course cannot, be definition, examine much of its content in depth, but it does its students a grave disservice if it simply provides the

"correct" interpretations of selected facts to be learned and returned. If the instructor can select some points for detailed study and critical thought by the students, they are more likely to profit from the survey because they will understand that the accepted facts may come to mean something quite different from their current interpretation.

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide some strategies for teaching conflicting interpretations by focusing on the New Deal efforts to improve the position of the farmers. After examining the programs adopted and their measurable results, it will look at the varied interpretations presented in monographs, articles, and texts.

#### Background and Significance of the Study

Teaching is not simply a relationship between an instructor and a pupil. Rather it is a three-fold relationship between the instructor, the subject or skill, and the pupil. One of the roles of the instructor is that of a bridge between the pupil and what it is he seeks to learn. The instructor's responsibility is to facilitate the learning process by breaking the subject matter down into its component parts in order that the

student may gradually master the total skill.<sup>1</sup> In the field of education there is a common assertion that instructors teach students and not subjects; this is a misleading conception. What instructors do is teach their subjects to students, and it is the subject which has to be adapted to the student.<sup>2</sup>

The survey history class attracts all types of students with all sorts of motives for registering in the class. Some students enroll because it is required for their degrees; others take it for cultural enrichment or for its intrinsic values; still others take it for reasons known only to themselves. Regardless of the reason for the students taking the class, it will probably be their only exposure to a history class in college. At the same time it is usually the only chance that the history instructor has to reveal to the student the values of history.<sup>3</sup> In many ways this is unfortunate because several problems are encountered in the survey history class.

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<sup>1</sup>W. H. Burston, Principles of History Teaching (London: Methuen & Co., 1963), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Michael V. Belok, "American History at the College Level," in The Teaching of History, ed. Joseph S. Roucek (New York: Philosophical Library, 1967), p. 137.

A major problem that arises in this class is the short amount of time allotted to cover so much material. Even though an aim of the survey course is only to "survey" American history, it is no less a problem, for there is a formidable amount of information that will be encountered. It is unreasonable to expect a student, even a major in the discipline, to be able to master the more complex subjects in a single school term; at best, the instructor can only lay some foundations for the discipline. A purpose of teaching history to undergraduates is to equip them with the special intellectual training embodied in the study of history at any level. This intellectual training consists of two elements: a sharpening of the analytical faculty; and, a deepening of the imaginative and constructive faculty.<sup>4</sup>

To complicate the matter further, the facts and the interpretations assigned to those facts oftentimes conflict and contradict one another. Every field of knowledge is constantly undergoing change. History is no exception. New facts, new interpretations, new challenges to established concepts are always being presented.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Godfrey R. Elton, The Practice of History (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1967), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup>W. Stull Holt, The Historical Profession in the United States (New York: MacMillan Co., 1963), p. 20.

Many times this causes the student to feel "lost" in the class because he does not have the training that will enable him to distinguish between the facts and the interpretations given to those facts. The instructor for students such as these in the survey history course can never expect to have time to explain each conflicting interpretation that may arise. Unless the instructor can demonstrate the broader principles of the discipline to the class, the student will forever give up on trying to understand history.

It is also unfortunate that the survey class will be the last course taken by the student, because many history instructors are not effective as teachers. To quote the noted historian, Dexter Perkins,

The truth is that the conventional Ph.D. program does not really adequately prepare the student for the thing he will be doing most of his life--that is, it does not teach him how to teach.<sup>6</sup>

A criticism of the preparation of the history faculty in the United States that Perkins makes is that "the teaching staff of most institutions granting the Ph.D. degree provides little or no guidance to young assistants in sections or classes under their direction." The staff

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<sup>6</sup>Dexter Perkins and John L. Snell, The Education of Historians in the United States (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1962), p. 9.

should at least inquire from the undergraduates how things are going.<sup>7</sup>

Very little has been written on "how to teach history." The fact is there are as many ways to teach history as there are history teachers. In an article entitled "American History at the College Level," Michael V. Belok says that a good rule is to "teach it the way you feel most comfortable."<sup>8</sup> Though this advice may be good for the instructor in that it may help him to become more comfortable in the classroom, it does not solve the student's problem of understanding conflicting interpretations.<sup>9</sup>

At one time the chief problem of the historian, as well as the instructor, was to discover the records of the past activities which he wished to investigate.<sup>10</sup> This is no longer the case, for historians have become

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>Roucek, The Teaching of History, pp. 137-38.

<sup>9</sup>More recently books have been forthcoming with a view towards filling this void. For examples see the following: Elton, pp. 142-78; Lester D. Stephens, Probing the Past (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1974), pp. 176-274; Martin Ballard, ed., New Movements in the Study and Teaching of History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970); and, Mark Krug, History and the Social Sciences: New Approaches to the Teaching of Social Studies (Waltham, Massachusetts: Blaisdell Publishers, 1967), pp. 92-277.

<sup>10</sup>Joseph R. Strayer, ed., The Interpretation of History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), p. 6.



more and more expert in learning where to look for source material relating to the past. Historians have realized, too, that written records are not necessarily the best sources for gaining an understanding of the past. They have acquired the skill of being able to gain information about the past by studying relics, artifacts, and other materials used by earlier peoples. Added to the facts that historians have uncovered is the knowledge that historians can draw on from other fields of related study-- anthropology, archeology, sociology, and others.

Freshman history students, laymen, and others who are not familiar with the methods of historians are apt to suppose that if each individual statement of fact in an historical work is correct, then the whole book will be trustworthy. Of course this is not necessarily true. In most cases the most mechanical part of the historian's task is to establish the truth of individual facts, and, to a certain extent, the accumulation of the facts is the easiest task of the historian.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the establishment of the truth of an individual fact, or even the truth of a whole series of facts, does not constitute the full realm of what the study of history is or should be.<sup>12</sup> There is more, much more.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

However, there are a set of problems that are presented by the facts. Homer Carey Hockett has presented his readers with many insights and warnings in regard to historical data and facts in his book, Introduction to Research in American History. After telling his readers that "the purpose of the historian is to ascertain facts, which becomes the basis of all generalizations or conclusions," Hockett warns his readers that "the raw material with which the historian works are statements, and . . . must not be mistaken as facts."<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, Talcott Parsons has written in his book, Toward A General Theory of Action, that history is "a selective system of cognitive orientations to reality." In effect his claim is that historians are selective in their facts and that what the historians report is based on less than all the facts. Thus, the implication is that the results of historical writings are falsely believed to be based on all the facts.<sup>14</sup> In his book, The Nature and Study of History, Henry Steele Commager maintains that "there are no facts . . . that can be relied on . . . only some agreed on assumptions" which historians have chosen to

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<sup>13</sup>Homer Carey Hockett, Introduction to Research in American History (New York: MacMillan Co., 1931), p. 58.

<sup>14</sup>Talcott Parsons, Toward a General Theory of Action (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 9-10.

call facts so that they can "get on with the job." Further he states that "facts are subjective, they exist in the mind of the historian, they change their character with each historian."<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, Geoffrey Barraclough writes, "the history we read though based on facts, is, strictly speaking, not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgements."<sup>16</sup>

There are other problems inherent in the facts. On certain subjects there is a paucity of information and on others there is too much.<sup>17</sup> For example, if a researcher were to attempt to compile a record of all the documents related to the public life of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, he would be overwhelmed by the mountain of documents found in the Roosevelt Papers at the Hyde Park Library. However, if one were seeking information on the assassination of President Kennedy the statement that "history has been called an enormous jig-saw with a lot of missing parts" would be very true.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Henry Steele Commager, The Nature and Study of History (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, 1965), p. 48.

<sup>16</sup>Geoffrey Barraclough, History in a Changing World (London: Basil Blackwell & Mott, 1955), p. 14.

<sup>17</sup>Commager, The Nature and Study of History, p. 48.

<sup>18</sup>Edward Hallett Carr, What is History? (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 12.

A second problem inherent in the nature of facts is that of maintaining accuracy. Praising a historian for getting his facts straight is like praising an airline pilot for using an accurate equation in drawing his flight plans or a home builder for using well seasoned timber or properly mixed concrete in his building. It is something that is expected and absolutely essential if the product is to be worthy.<sup>19</sup>

One does not have to be a scholar to realize that if some information is found in a book that it does not automatically constitute the complete truth. Two considerations that lend support to this statement are that "no document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought (or what he perceived the facts were)"<sup>20</sup> and the lack of any instrument or device that can measure the facts so that we may know when all the data has been collected.<sup>21</sup> Henry Steele Commager writes,

Let us admit at once that history is neither scientific nor mechanical, that the ideal history, completely objective and dispassionate, is an illusion.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 8

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>21</sup>Stephens, Probing the Past, pp. 12-13.

<sup>22</sup>Commager, Nature and Study of History, p. 53.

There are many factors that come into play in determining what is important to the historian and how he projects his study. Inevitably, then, the historian is biased in his choice of a subject, biased in the selection of material, biased in the organization and presentation, and biased in the interpretation of the subject. Consciously or unconsciously, all historians are biased; they are affected by the times in which they lived, their socio-economic background, their race, and other like elements.<sup>23</sup>

Still facts alone mean nothing until the historian begins to work with them. As E. H. Carr observes,

The historian and the facts of history are necessary to one another. The historian without his facts is rootless and futile; that facts without their historian are dead and meaningless.<sup>24</sup>

It is not enough to suggest that the historian bases his work on facts. Lester D. Stephens states,

The remorseless grubbing after new facts . . . is futile per se. . . . Unless we are continually drawing new patterns and weaving new clothes, history degenerates into sheer antiquarianism.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Carr, What is History, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup>Stephens, Probing the Past, p. 62.

Historical investigation does not propose to explain events in terms of mere effects and developments. Were this to be the case and were the study of history only a reproduction of what is permanently identical with itself, it would be without moral content. The essence of historical interpretation lies in seeing realities in past events.<sup>26</sup>

The task of the historian is to trace the evidence and then write out the chronological sequence of events. He not only seeks to know what happened but also why. Consequently, it becomes necessary to offer an explanation of past events. Explanation involves interpretation of facts, generalizations from the evidence, and application of the concept of causation. All of these elements are intertwined.<sup>27</sup>

Discovering and classifying information, facts, and other data has solved the problem of assembling facts but has created a more troublesome one for the instructor-historian. In its simplest terms, the new problem is to find some pattern for a multitude of individual facts. There are always more facts available than any historian can master; he can deal with them only by arranging them

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<sup>26</sup>Johann Gustav Droysen, Outline of the Principles of History (Grundriss Der Historik), trans. E. Benjamin Andrews (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967), p. 26.

<sup>27</sup>Stephens, Probing the Past, p. 61.

into categories and by generalizing from the classifications which he has made. Yet he knows that no one event is exactly like another, and that a single difference may be more significant than many resemblances.<sup>28</sup>

In his book, Probing the Past, Lester D. Stephens has identified the problem:

Since the past has already occurred, it cannot be captured exactly as it happened, or even if it were totally recaptured, as in a photograph we would not know it because we have no way of determining that it is an exact and precise picture. The historian, then, must paint a picture of the past, but as he does so with the goal in mind of painting it as accurately as possible. . . . Naturally, one historian's painting may differ in varying degrees from those of others because paintings of the past represent a collage of events and impressions shaped into some kind of pattern or meaning, i.e., into some kind of interpretation. This is true because facts have no meaning of their own, and the painting represents the individual historian's own perception of reality.<sup>29</sup>

The moment the historian begins to select and arrange his facts into patterns, he has begun to interpret the facts. Consequently, interpretations of the facts will differ among historians according to what they select for emphasis and how they choose to arrange the facts. This statement should not be taken as an indication that one man's interpretation is as good as another's or that all

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<sup>28</sup>Strayer, Interpretation of History, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup>Stephens, Probing the Past, pp. 12-13.

interpretations are of equal worth. Every historian does not possess the same mental capacities. Even the most competent historians will vary in the quality of their interpretations, and thus to accept uncritically any single interpretation as certain and true for all time is to court dogmatism of the first magnitude.<sup>30</sup> A number of historians have stated why interpretations are useful and necessary.

The massing and linking of facts is not only essential if history is to have any value; it is also inevitable, since it is the way in which the human mind deals with any past experience. Essential and inevitable though it be, it is the point of greatest danger in all historical writing. It is quite obvious that facts can be massed in such a way as to produce a misleading impression, even though each individual fact may be true.<sup>31</sup>

Instructors, like historians, should be encouraged to seek new answers in their attempts to reach the truth. The fact that pundits contradict each other so flagrantly supports more research. To accept others' interpretations without questioning them is a professional impropriety.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>31</sup>Strayer, Interpretation of History, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>Carr, What is History, p. 4.



To make the point even more clear the historian, G. Kitson Clark, reminds us that "history to mean anything must be more than a rehearsal of facts, it must include an interpretation of the facts."<sup>33</sup>

Addressing himself to students in particular Michael V. Belok maintains that "students need to be made aware of differing interpretations among historians."<sup>34</sup> The benefits of this are that knowledge of differing interpretations should do more than to counteract the tendency to seek only one answer to social problems. It will foster a more critical and sophisticated approach of seeking out multiple causes. Historical revision is a healthy activity when it is done for the sake of better understanding and for the cause of truth. Historical revisionism is more than a matter of keeping historians busy; it prevents us from falling victim to the "established" interpretation, and it is entirely in keeping with an attitude of critical inquiry.<sup>35</sup> "The great danger inherent in a school of interpretation is," states Lester D. Stephens, "that by writing history strictly

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<sup>33</sup>G. Kitson Clark, The Critical Historian (New York: Basic Books, 1967), p. 42.

<sup>34</sup>Belok, "American History," p. 136.

<sup>35</sup>Stephens, Probing the Past, p. 65.

from the prevailing premises, the historian is apt to formulate a priori judgements."<sup>36</sup>

In interpreting his subject the historian should be neither a manipulator, slave, nor master of his facts. The relationship between the historian and his facts is one of give-and-take. As he writes, the historian reflects upon his facts and engages himself in a continuous process of moulding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts. It should be the aim of the historian to treat the facts and the interpretations equally and not attempt to assign primacy to one over the other.<sup>37</sup> Professor Carr was almost repeating the noted British historian, Robin G. Collingwood, who had stated that the philosophy of history is concerned neither with "the past by itself" nor with "the historian's thoughts about it by itself," but with "the two things in their mutual relations."<sup>38</sup>

The types of problems and conflicts that have been described above constitute the kinds of subject matter that fills the pages of many textbooks, and it is this

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>37</sup>Carr, What is History, pp. 34-35.

<sup>38</sup>Robin G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 2.

same matter that must be made comprehensible to the student. Considering the complexity of it all, it would be an impossible task for the instructor to systematically explain every conflict to the survey class. Therefore, the instructor must be selective and, on occasion, choose topics to illustrate how conflicting interpretations come into being and how they may be explained or solved. These illustrations would go far in promoting analytical thinking on the part of the student, and should also provide the instructor with an opportunity to demonstrate how conflicting interpretations can be covered in the survey course. The New Deal would make an excellent example.

#### Definition of Terms

In this study on the problem of conflicting interpretations in the survey history class with the New Deal being the area focused upon there are three terms that warrant defining. These words are conservative, radical, and interpretation.

The words conservative and radical have elusive qualities about them. They can not be measured in the same manner as inches, miligrams, or similar other entities. In this study they will be used in relation to the direction of the federal government's policies prior to 1933 and then during the New Deal. Resisting change and disposed to preserve existing conditions are two

of the words and phrases used to define conservative in the College Edition of the Random House Dictionary of the English Language. The term conservative shall convey the same meaning as it relates to the direction of the government's policies in this study. The same source listed above defines the word radical as extremist and favoring drastic political, economic, or social reforms. This study shall use the term to connote the meaning presented above.

When a person interprets something they are, in fact, explaining their perception of the object being observed. The interpreter is an intermediary. Though he may witness or observe the subject under scrutiny, the interpreter can only report what he perceives the meaning of the facts to be. The word interpretation shall be used in this study to construe the efforts to explain the facts which have been verified.

#### Limitations of the Study

The present study will confine itself to the time span from 1933 to about 1940. This period in American history bears the label, "the New Deal era." The New Deal was launched by Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the day that he was inaugurated, March 4, 1933, and it lasted to about 1940 when Roosevelt began to focus his attention away from the depression to foreign affairs and the menace arising in Europe.

This study will further limit itself to the agricultural aspects of the New Deal. One of the reasons for this is that most college survey history textbooks contain a fair discussion on the problems of agriculture and most of the major legislation affecting this sphere. Another reason for this limitation is that the scope of the New Deal was so broad (and many times contradictory) that it will provide a better example if only a certain area of the program is examined. And lastly, one of the trends or developments in the discipline is the application of quantitative analysis. Instead of taking the shotgun approach of studying broad topical areas, historians are narrowing their topics down to manageable sizes so that the treatment of the subject may be made more scientific or demonstrable. In the case of quantitative analysis, historians are subjecting more limited areas to more intense examination.

#### Basic Assumption

The overriding assumption that this study makes is that equally valid arguments can be formulated showing the New Deal as revolutionary, evolutionary, and conservative. Men measure movements from a comparison with their own life experiences and from the times in which they live. Whereas one group of historians who may have matured during a certain generation and who became imbued

with a set of values that caused them to see the New Deal as being revolutionary in nature, a second group of historians who matured during a different period may regard the same movement as a conservative one. Also, through the selection and the placing of emphasis on certain facts regarding the New Deal and the slighting or downplaying of others, contradictory conclusions based on the same factual data can be reached. This writer does not expect his study to provide a definitive answer regarding the nature of the New Deal.

#### Procedures for Collecting Data

The procedures used for the construction of this paper will conform to the standards and methods suggested in such works as Homer Carey Hockett's The Critical Method in Historical Writing and Jacques Barzun and Henry G. Graff's The Modern Researcher. Indexes like the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, the Public Affairs Information Service Bulletin, and Social Sciences and Humanities Index will be consulted; for newspapers the New York Times Index and the Wall Street Journal Index will be used. Directories such as Ulrich's International Periodical Directory and the Standard Periodical Directory will be utilized. No search for useful documents on American history should be concluded without consulting the Harvard Guide to American History. Journals such as the Southern

Historical Review, American Historical Journal, and Agricultural History will be helpful for this study. Although the bulk of the material for this study will come from secondary works like William Leuchtenburg's Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, Richard Hofstadter's The Age of Reform, and Basil Rauch's The History of the New Deal, 1933-1938 along with textbooks like Garraty's The American Nation and Current, Williams, and Freidel's American History, some primary documents will be used like The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS OF THE NEW DEAL

In the years between 1860 and 1900 agriculture in the United States underwent an economic revolution.<sup>39</sup> During this period the farmers' implements, tools, and machines were greatly improved from their primitive state and raised to a high level of efficiency. These new machines were powered not by muscles, but by engines. Also, the farmers ended their traditional attempts at self-sufficiency and began to specialize in growing certain money crops to be sold on the domestic and foreign markets. Those items needed on the farm that the farmers used to make themselves were now purchased with the profits brought from the sale of their crops. And, too, the farmers began to employ the knowledge revealed to them by the scientists; this aided them in increasing their output. These developments resulted in the commercialization of agriculture, and success was tied to productivity.

Even though agriculture was changing and expanding during this period, it was not one of uninterrupted prosperity. The farmers enjoyed a measure of prosperity up

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<sup>39</sup>Harold D. Guither, Heritage of Plenty: A Guide to the Economic History and Development of United States Agriculture (Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 73.



through the Civil War because of the great demand for the farmers' products during the war and the inflationary impact of the greenbacks. But the overall trend from 1860 to 1900, though irregular, was one of nearly continuous depression. The years from 1872 to 1878 and 1887 to 1896 were especially bad for the farmers.<sup>40</sup>

The reasons for the fall of farm prices are not hard to find. The increased amount of land put into production and the mechanization taking place on the farm resulted in a tremendous increase of production that flooded the market. Other nations like Australia and Argentina began to compete with the American farmers. The rapid expansion of communication and transportation facilities had made the market international in scope.<sup>41</sup>

During the twenty years following the 1860 to 1900 period, the farmers enjoyed a relatively good status in relationship to the overall American economy. This was one of the very few times when the prices received by the farmers for their products were higher than those received for non-agricultural goods. This was so because the demand for agricultural products outpaced supply.

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<sup>40</sup>Harold Underwood Faulkner, American Economic History (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1954), p. 366.

<sup>41</sup>Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr. and Nelson Manfred Blake, Since 1900: A History of the United States in Our Times (New York: Macmillan Company, 1974), pp. 20-21.

The lands in the West were opening up at a slower rate and the production of staples slowed during these years. Also, the large influx of immigrants helped the urban population to grow about 40 percent between 1900 and 1910. These persons had to be fed and clothed with farm products. However, World War I was the most important factor that raised the demand for farm goods.<sup>42</sup>

The years between 1919 and 1923 marked a turning point in the economic, political, and social trends of agriculture.<sup>43</sup> After having enjoyed about twenty years of general prosperity, the prices of agricultural products began to drop during the second half of 1920, and this signaled an eighteen month depression in agriculture. After this short period of decline the farm prices rose and remained constant at about 90 percent of the 1909-1914 levels of prosperity. This condition lasted until the collapse of the stock market in 1929.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>43</sup>James Shideler, Farm Crisis, 1919-1923 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1976), pp. 16-19.

<sup>44</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Crisis of the Old Order, 1919-1933 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), pp. 105-10 and pp. 174-75. For parity rates see U. S. Bureau of the Census, The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present (Stamford, Connecticut: Fairfield Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 283. Hereinafter cited as Statistical History.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, it did not take long for the precarious condition of the farmers to reveal itself. Since 1920 the farmers had incurred a moderate decline in their prices, and with the crash of the stock market their fortunes sank to new lows. The crises facing the farmers were many: their overall income had fallen; not only had prices for farm commodities slumped, but the prices of farm produce had fallen far more rapidly than prices of farm necessities; the interest and taxes they had to pay remained high; and the international market was glutted.

Farm prices declined by an average of 55 percent from 1929 to 1933. The commodities traded on the international market, like wheat, cotton and tobacco, declined more than other crops. The farmers' purchasing power fell by 40 percent from 1929 to 1932. Between these years while farm prices fell by 55 percent, the things that they had to purchase fell by only 30 percent.<sup>45</sup> This placed the farmers in a disadvantaged situation in relation to other segments of the economy.

The taxes and interest they paid in 1929 were almost constant with those paid in 1932. In the former

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<sup>45</sup>Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 5 vols. (New York: Random House, 1938), Vol. 2: The Year of Crisis, p. 75.

year interest and taxes amounted to less than a quarter of the production expenses; in 1932 they amounted to over one-third of the total. Because of contracted foreign markets, a weakened domestic market, and the continued high rate of production, huge surpluses hung over the marketplace.<sup>46</sup>

The net farm income of farm operators from farming in 1925 was \$6,734,000,000; in 1927 it was \$5,699,000,000; and in 1929 it had fallen to \$6,152,000,000. Over the next four years it continued to decline to where in 1933 it stood at \$2,555,000,000.<sup>47</sup> When it is realized that the farmers had other costs--operating expenses, wages to pay, taxes and interest--it becomes even more obvious that the farmers were in dire straits.

The critical condition that agriculture entered after World War I continued throughout the decade of the twenties. Herbert Hoover had been the president of the nation when the plight of agriculture became more tenuous with the crash of the stock market. And although he made several attempts to ease the farmers' burden, the overall deficits in agriculture remained.

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 75-76.

<sup>47</sup>U. S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing, 1975), p. 483. Hereinafter cited as Historical Statistics.

This situation set the stage for the political revolt in 1932 which brought in a new administration pledged to giving the American people leadership and bold, positive action. The farmers, who had organized themselves to exert political pressure on a large scale in 1919, had won some successes in the twenties while the Republicans were in office, but, still, major problems plagued the farmers even into the Hoover administration. Feeling that the Republicans had failed to redress their problems, the farmers and their organizations helped to unseat the incumbents.<sup>48</sup>

The Democrats chose Franklin Delano Roosevelt to oppose Hoover in the 1932 presidential election. In the campaigning for the presidency, Roosevelt made his most important pitch to the farmers for support on 14 September 1932 in Topeka, Kansas. He began his address by recognizing the desperate condition of the six and one-half million farm families who represented 22 percent of the American population. In 1920 this 22 percent received 15 percent of the national income; in 1925 the farmers' share was only 9 percent; and in 1932 the

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<sup>48</sup>Louis Bernard Schmidt, "The Role and Techniques of Agrarian Pressure Groups," Agricultural History 30 (April 1956): p. 54.

Department of Agriculture reported that they received only 7 percent of the nation's income.<sup>49</sup>

To resolve the farmers' problems the Democratic Party's platform contained nothing which might alienate any group of farmers. Roosevelt's specification for a farm bill as outlined at Topeka included the following concepts: the bill would create a program that was strictly voluntary; it must enhance and strengthen the cooperative movement; it should not enlarge the bureaucracy; it should be decentralized so that it could be carried out on the local level rather than in Washington, D. C.; it should finance itself; and, it should not dump the surpluses on the international market. Although he would support it later, limiting crops was not proposed in this address.<sup>50</sup>

Roosevelt was successful in sweeping the incumbent out of office, and shortly after his inaugural the new president began his New Deal. In regards to agriculture there were four major problems that the president sought to resolve. The need for immediate credit to prevent

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<sup>49</sup>Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 5 vols. (New York: Random House, 1938), Vol. 1: The Genesis of the New Deal, p. 696.

<sup>50</sup>William R. Johnson, "National Farm Organizations and the Shaping of Agricultural Policy in 1932," Agricultural History 37 (January 1963): pp. 35-37.

the foreclosing on the farmers' mortgages was the most pressing problem that demanded Roosevelt's attention. A second problem of the farmers was the great contraction of their purchasing power due to the failure of agricultural prices to keep up with non-farm prices. A third area of major concern was the plight of the rural poor. And lastly, the abuse of the farmlands demanded some redress by the federal government.

#### Farm Credit

A common procedure for buying a farm was for the buyer to pay 10 percent down and then pay the remainder of the debt within the next one to five years. The buyer would secure a first mortgage from the federal land bank, joint-stock land banks, an insurance company, a mortgage company or a bank for as much as the lender was willing to loan, with the seller of the land taking a second mortgage for the balance of the purchase price. Already greatly extended in debt the farmer began to owe secondary creditors, including the doctor, the grocer, the farm equipment dealer, and others.<sup>51</sup>

When the prices received by the farmers fell to such drastic lows, credit available to them all but disappeared,

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<sup>51</sup>H. C. M. Case, "Farm Debt Adjustment During the Early 1930's," Agricultural History 34 (October 1960): p. 174.

and they faced the firm prospect of losing their land. The joint-stock land banks foreclosed the accounts of the more delinquent farmers in an effort to protect the value of their bonds. The insurance companies also foreclosed on the more delinquent farmers to protect their own credit standing. The banks followed suit when their more substantial customers came in to borrow money. The secondary creditors such as grocers and implement dealers, whose own need for capital was critical, began forcing other farmers into bankruptcy when they called on the farmers to pay their debts. Legal actions such as these forced thousands of farmers into foreclosure or bankruptcy.<sup>52</sup> Over one million farmers were in this precarious condition.

In 1910 the farm mortgage debt in the United States stood at three billion dollars. Between 1915 and 1920 it doubled, and in 1922 stood at nine billion dollars where it stayed until 1929. Because of forced sales and foreclosures the figure was reduced to about eight billion dollars on the eve of Roosevelt's inaugural. Including the interest burden, the total farm debt in 1933 was at least twelve billion dollars.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.



Since the farmers were receiving less money for their crops, they were losing their farms at an increasing rate. The average rate of farm foreclosures in the 1926 to 1930 period was 17 per each 1000 farms; in 1933 the rate of foreclosures was 39 per 1000 farms. Between 1920 and 1930 almost five hundred thousand farmers lost their farms because of their inability to pay their monthly mortgage notes. To further illustrate the problem it is estimated that while in 1910 nearly two-thirds of the farmers had owned their land, in 1932 more than half of the farmers were tenants.<sup>53</sup>

In 1932, the Democratic Party had entered a plank in its platform promising some relief for the farm mortgage crises. The plank stated:

We favor . . . better financing of farm mortgages through recognized farm bank agencies at low rates of interest on an amortization plan, giving preference to credits for the redemption of farms and homes sold under foreclosure.<sup>54</sup>

One of the first attempts by the Roosevelt Administration to make good this campaign promise to relieve the capital and credit problems of the farmers resulted in a

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<sup>53</sup>Historical Statistics, pp. 465-66.

<sup>54</sup>Rosenman, Year of Crisis, p. 102.

move to strengthen and invigorate the government-sponsored farm credit agencies. Using the authority granted to him by Congress in the amended Legislative Appropriation Act of 1933, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 6034 on 27 March 1933, which created the Farm Credit Administration.<sup>55</sup>

This action consolidated into one agency all the federal governmental organizations dealing primarily with agricultural credit. The organizations affected were the Federal Farm Board, the Federal Farm Loan Board, the agricultural credit functions of the Secretary of Agriculture, and the portions of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation giving aid to regional agricultural credit corporations. The FCA was organized to provide a more efficient and coordinated credit service for farmers at lower cost. The major powers of the FCA were those of making loans to cooperatives and of furnishing aid to cooperatives through the research and service division.<sup>56</sup>

Executive Order No. 6084 abolished the Federal Farm Board that Hoover had created and replaced it with the FCA. The powers and functions of the former agency

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<sup>55</sup>Murray R. Benedict, Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), pp. 280-81.

<sup>56</sup>Rosenman, Year of Crisis, pp. 84-90.

were retained by the latter. The Office of Chairman of the Federal Farm Board was changed to Governor of the FCA. The Governor was given the powers to consolidate, regroup, and transfer the various offices and bureaus together. In a similar manner and with a view towards establishing a more unified system to handle the credit agencies, the functions of the Secretaries of Agriculture and Treasury as members of the Federal Farm Board and Federal Farm Loan Board were transferred to the Farm Loan Commissioner. The Federal Farm Loan Board was also abolished, and its powers and duties were transferred to a Land Bank Commissioner serving under the Governor of the FCA. Lastly, the FCA was vested with the functions of the Departments of Agriculture and Treasury as federal credit sources.<sup>57</sup>

Within eighteen months the FCA would refinance a fifth of all farm mortgages. Also the FCA rendered a valuable service when it assisted in establishing local debt adjustment committees that sought to find alternate solutions other than bankruptcy courts for those farmers unable to pay their debts.<sup>58</sup> Another activity that the FCA engaged in was that of granting rescue loans for

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<sup>57</sup>Benedict, Farm Policies, p. 281.

<sup>58</sup>Case, "Farm Debt Adjustment", pp. 176-78.

second mortgages, and later it developed a system of regional banks to make mortgage, production and marketing loans, and to provide credits to cooperatives. Because of the FCA's work farm interest rates declined in all areas of farm credit, and even though there was much room for improvement the FCA offered substantial help to the farmers and moved the government closer towards arresting the debt problem. The powers of the FCA were confirmed by Congress in the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act and supplemented with the Farm Credit Act of 16 June 1933.<sup>59</sup>

The Farm Credit Act was passed by Congress in 1933. The stated purposes of this Act were to provide for organizations within the FCA to make loans for the production and marketing of agricultural products and to amend both the Federal Farm Loan Act and the Agricultural Marketing Act. This measure liquidated the joint-stock land banks and the regional agricultural credit corporations which had been created under the RFC. In addition the authorization for creating additional national agricultural credit corporations was negated.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), p. 45.

<sup>60</sup> Farm Credit Act of 1933, Statutes at Large 48 secs. 1-2, 257 (1933).

The Farm Credit Act was composed of four major segments with each being headed by a commissioner. One section was made up of twelve land banks which could grant mortgage loans. A second section was composed of thirteen banks which could grant loans to cooperatives. A third section consisted of twelve intermediate credit banks that could make marketing and production loans. And last was a section made up of twelve production credit corporations that could reach and serve the individual farmers.<sup>61</sup>

This Act authorized the Governor of the FCA to organize and charter twelve corporations to be known as "Production Credit Corporations" and twelve banks to be known as "Banks for Cooperatives." These PCA's and Banks for Cooperatives were to be located in each city where there was a Federal Land Bank. In each corporation the initial capital stock was \$7.5 million. A revolving fund to serve the FCA of one hundred and twenty million dollars was established. The PCA's could be established whenever ten or more farmers who wanted to borrow some money came together. Each PCA could make loans for general agricultural purposes.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., sec. 20, p. 259.

Title II of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which is commonly referred to as the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, addressed itself more directly with providing immediate credit to save the farmers. It provided several relief measures for farmers threatened with the prospects of losing their farms. The Farm Loan Commissioner was authorized to grant two billion dollars in farm loan bonds, and this amount, along with the interest, was guaranteed by the United States government.<sup>63</sup>

The Emergency Farm Mortgage Act provided loans for the purchase, reduction, and refinancing of first mortgages on farm lands. A limit of fifty percent was allowed for the smaller amount of the unpaid principal on the mortgage or the value of the land mortgaged. If a farmer was unable to make his monthly payment a deferment could be granted to him if the bank deemed him worthy. Also, the Commissioner of the Farm Loan Commission could extend him an emergency loan. It limited the interest rate to 4½ percent on loans encouraged by the government; this covered those loans that were outstanding, as well as those made within two years after the passage of this law. The Secretary of Treasury was to underwrite the

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<sup>63</sup>Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, Statutes at Large 48 secs. 21-26, 41-45 (1933).

cost so that the lending institution would receive the interest and principal. The limitation on the amount of loans was raised from \$25,000 to \$50,000.<sup>64</sup>

Title II of the AAA authorized the RFC to make available one hundred million dollars to the Farm Loan Commissioner to make loans to joint-stock land banks organized and doing business under the Federal Farm Loan Act. The amount to be loaned to each bank was limited to 60 percent of the value of the collateral on first mortgages. There was a stipulation which provided for the orderly liquidation of member mortgagors. The funds provided to the Commissioner could also be used to grant "rescue" loans to those faced with the near potential of being foreclosed on their first mortgage.

This Act was designed to provide relief for both farm borrowers and mortgage creditors. Those holders of farm mortgages could exchange them for Federal Land Bank bonds with the Treasury Department guaranteeing the interest payment. Those farmers whose mortgages would be exchanged for these bonds would be benefitted with lower interest rates and longer terms of repayment. At the same time Roosevelt urged the mortgage creditors to abstain from bringing foreclosure proceedings because

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., sec. 26, p. 44.

it would take time for the government to set up the credit agencies created by Congress to help resolve the problem.<sup>65</sup>

On 10 January 1934, in a message to Congress, Franklin D. Roosevelt asked that legislation amending the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act of 1933 be passed because it was becoming more clear that the \$200,000,000 used to capitalize the project was not enough to meet the demands that were flooding into the Land Bank Commissioner's office and the offices of the Federal Land Banks. In response to this request Congress passed the Federal Farm Mortgage Corporation Act on 11 January 1934, to assist in financing the Federal Land Banks during the emergency farm crisis and to provide additional funds for Land Bank Commissioner loans.<sup>66</sup>

The Federal Farm Mortgage Corporation was capitalized at \$200,000,000 and was subscribed to by the Governor of the Farm Credit Administration who was authorized to issue bonds for up to two billion dollars. The United States government fully and unconditionally guaranteed the interest and principal. These funds were to be made

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<sup>65</sup>Rosenman, Year of Crisis, p. 176.

<sup>66</sup>Federal Farm Mortgage Corporation Act, Statutes at Large 48, secs. 1-18, 344-49 (1933-1934).



available to the Land Bank Commissioner through the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act of 1933.<sup>67</sup>

Between 1 May 1933 and 30 September 1937 the Federal Land Banks and Commissioner loaned some \$2,207,000,000 to about 540,000 farmers. By the latter date over one-third of the estimated farm mortgage debts were held by them. About 90 percent of this money went to pay off old mortgage debts owed to commercial banks, life insurance companies, taxing agencies, and other creditors.<sup>68</sup>

By 1936 most of the farm mortgage crisis had abated. Farm mortgage foreclosures during the year ending 15 March 1936 were only 20 per 1000 farms as compared to 39 per 1000 farms in the Spring of 1933. During 1936 only 7,000 loan applications per month were received; in October 1933 some 707,000 applications were received. In 1936 only \$186,400,000 in loans were granted to farmers as compared to some \$1,283,500,000 in 1934.<sup>69</sup>

#### Decline of Farm Prices

Another problem facing the farmers that was no less of a concern was the continuing decline in the prices

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Rosenman, Year of Crisis, p. 182.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

they were receiving for their products. Their plight on the eve of the New Deal was desperate. Whereas in 1925 the farmers' share of the national income was 11.5 percent, it had fallen to only 5.8 percent of the total by 1933. The cash farm income fell by 58 percent during this period from \$10,417,000,000 in 1929 to only \$4,377,000,000 in 1933. When costs like taxes and interest, operating expenses and wages paid for labor are considered the decline was even more severe. In fact, the per capita cash net income declined during these three years from \$167.00 to \$48.00.<sup>70</sup> If the August, 1909 to July, 1914 period is used as a comparative date, the purchasing power of farm products (i.e., the ratio of farm to non-farm prices) had been as follows: 1909-1914, 100; 1929, 90; June, 1932-March, 1933, 50.

In a major address to the Congress on 16 March 1933, President Roosevelt spoke of the crises in agriculture with a spirit of alarm and desperation:

I tell you frankly that it is a new and untrod path, but I tell you with equal frankness that an unprecedented condition calls for the trial of new means to rescue agriculture.

The president was seeking legislation designed to raise the purchasing power of the farmers, increase the asset

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<sup>70</sup>Rosenman, Year of Crisis, p. 75.

value of the farm loans made to agriculture, and to provide mortgage relief for the farmers. The legislation being proposed for agriculture by Roosevelt was a matter demanding immediate attention because the spring planting was about to be done. If the legislation was delayed for six weeks or more, production would increase and prices would fall even more.<sup>71</sup>

By April of 1933, the farmers had lost their patience with the efforts of the government to help them, for the condition of agriculture had grown progressively worse. They had begun to physically stop farm mortgage foreclosures. They intercepted produce headed for the market and destroyed it in their frustration against depressed prices. Milo Reno and the Farmers' Holiday Association decided to go beyond their usual demonstrations and called for a national farmers' strike that was to go into effect on 13 May 1933.<sup>72</sup> On the twelfth of May, Congress passed the Agricultural Adjustment Act which was the first effort by the government to raise farm prices during the New Deal.

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<sup>71</sup>Rosenman, Year of Crisis, p. 74

<sup>72</sup>William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 51.

After his election Roosevelt had called on his Secretary of Agriculture to draw up a farm plan incorporating the domestic allotment plan. In carrying out this request, Henry A. Wallace called on farm leaders for input and then sat down with Mordecai Ezekiel, Frederic P. Lee, and Jerome Frank to draft the necessary bill.

Their efforts resulted in an attempt that sought not only to limit production but also to achieve a balance of farm to non-farm prices by shifting production out of surplus lines which would hopefully result in "agricultural adjustment". Several methods were sought to achieve these ends, and the domestic allotment program was at its center. The McNary-Haugen features of incorporating the power to control the quantity of commodities released for sale through marketing agreements and quotas and the power to stimulate exports through subsidies were included. Other schemes were included in the bill; the power to reduce production through leasing farm land and withdrawing it from cultivation, the power to maintain prices through government loans on storable crops or through direct government purchase, and the power to enforce compliance through the licensing of processors. This bold bill contained all

the features of the agricultural policy that would be pursued by the government for the next twenty-five years.<sup>73</sup>

The theory behind the AAA of 1933 was threefold. It sought to provide relief to farm populations through price enhancement and benefit payments to insure them some income to carry on the farm operations. The benefit payments were to be drawn from special excise taxes on the commodity, which were to be paid by consumers and processors so that farmers would receive higher prices instead of lower ones brought on by a depressed market. And to achieve parity the measure sought to benefit only those farmers who participated in the program.<sup>74</sup>

Title I of the AAA sought to reestablish farm prices at parity with non-farm products at the ratio that existed during the base period of August, 1909--July, 1914. Since the Great War had changed the tobacco-consuming habits of the entire world, August, 1919 to July, 1929 was used as the base period for tobacco. At the same time, the law

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Schlesinger, The Coming of the New Deal, pp. 86-88.

74 Edwin G. Nourse, Joseph S. David, John D. Black, Three Years of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution, 1937), p. 23.

sought to protect the consumer by not increasing the percentage of the expenditures that they made for farm purchases before the war.

The Secretary of Agriculture was the primary official responsible for putting the Act into effect. To do so, Congress provided him with two groups of powers. One group allowed him to enter into voluntary agreements with farmers so that production could be adjusted in such a way as to help raise prices. To accomplish this, the Secretary could provide financial assistance to those farmers entering into contracts to limit production by means of rental or benefit payments.<sup>75</sup>

Initially the AAA sought only to benefit the seven basic commodities of wheat, cotton, corn, hogs, rice, tobacco, and milk and its products. The reasons for this were that there were exportable surpluses in them and also because the prices received for them strongly influenced the prices of other farm commodities. Furthermore, since they all went through the same general manufacturing process, it would contribute towards setting up the machinery for regulating the products and applying the processing tax.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 177-78.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

A second group of powers specifically assigned the Secretary of Agriculture was that of drawing up marketing agreements with processors, farmers' associations, and others engaged in the handling of farm products in an effort to raise the farmers' income. Being exempt from the provisions of the anti-trust laws, the marketing agreements allowed all agricultural products to have regulations for production quotas, prices, and supply areas. To make the program effective the Secretary was authorized to grant licenses to those involved in processing and distributing agricultural products. If violations were discovered the Secretary could revoke the processors' license.<sup>77</sup>

Financing this program was a processing tax that was levied by the Secretary upon the first domestic processing of the product at a rate fixed at the difference between the current average farm price for the particular commodity and the fair exchange value of the product. The funds collected were paid to those cooperating farmers who had signed contracts with the Secretary. Also, the farmers benefitted from the higher prices that they would receive for their goods. If the processing tax raised the prices of the commodity to the extent that the consumer

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

would lessen his demand for the product causing further crop surpluses, the Secretary could lower the tax.<sup>78</sup>

By 1935 the AAA of 1933 and subsequent amendatory legislation were providing five principal methods for agricultural crop adjustment. They were as follows: voluntary crop reduction agreements between the Secretary of Agriculture and individual farmers, marketing agreements, provisions for surplus removal and marketing improvements, forced control through tax programs designed to help control production like the Bankhead Cotton Act and Kerr Tobacco Act, and the reserve food and fiber programs that would help protect the nation from extreme price fluctuations.<sup>79</sup>

Between 1933 and 1935 the AAA signed production adjustment contracts with 8,400,000 farmers involving about 19,400,000 separate payments to them. For these contracts the government expended about one and a half billion dollars. Of this amount, 1.1 billion went as rental and benefit payments, one sixth of it (\$233,400,000) was devoted to the removal of surplus crops, drought

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-79.

<sup>79</sup>Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 5 vols. (New York: Random House, 1938, Vol. 4: The Court Disapproves, p. 435.



purchases of feed, seed, and diseased cattle.<sup>80</sup> A sensational episode of the AAA occurred when the Secretary of Agriculture allotted over \$100 million for the crop and animal destruction phase of the program that resulted in the slaughter of six million little piglets and two hundred thousand sows.<sup>81</sup> The motive for taking these actions was to raise prices through limiting production.

A few figures will suffice to illustrate the effectiveness of the program. In 1932 about 205,600,000 acres were producing commodities that later would be in the crop reduction program. A year later this acreage had been reduced to 197,000,000 acres and 19,882,000 of this was under production control contracts. The figures for 1935 were 180,129,000 and 150,543,000 acres, respectively.<sup>82</sup>

Title III of the AAA was another scheme employed by Roosevelt to raise farm prices. The farmers, who had historically believed that an inflated currency worked in their favor, pressed this measure upon Roosevelt. Senator Elmer Thomas, the leader of the inflationists in the Senate, combined several techniques including

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, pp. 72-73.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 437

remonetizing silver, inflating the dollar, and the authorization of paper money into an omnibus inflation amendment to the then proposed agricultural adjustment bill.<sup>83</sup>

After he realized that he could not defeat Thomas' inflationary resolution, President Roosevelt sent word to his backers of what form of the bill he would accept. The rewritten version of the proposed bill authorized him to remonetize silver, print greenbacks, or alter the gold content in the dollar. Consequently on 19 April 1933 Roosevelt took America off the gold standard and shortly thereafter remonetized silver. The design here was to free his hands to engage in domestic price-fixing.

Although an inflating of the currency was probably desirable, it neither had the salutary effects as predicted by supporters of the movement nor did it result in the doom of a capitalistic, democratic America as feared by its opponents. To the dismay of the farmers and some economists the price level did not rise in a precise relation to the declining gold content in the dollar.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Schlesinger, Coming of the New Deal, pp. 41-42.

<sup>84</sup>Benedict, Farm Policies, p. 299.

The AAA programs assisted the farmers in recovering much of their lost purchasing power. During the three years that the AAA was in effect the farmers' share of the national income rose from 5.7 percent in 1932 to 10.3 percent in 1935. Farm income rose from \$4,377,000,000 in 1932 to \$7,201,000,000 in 1935. The net cash income of the farmers rose 163 percent during the period; in 1932 it amounted to \$1,473,000,000 and in 1935 it stood at \$3,869,000,000. The per capita net income rose from \$48 to \$122. Even after the increases in prices are taken into consideration, the purchasing power of the farmers was forty-one percent greater in 1935 than it had been in 1932. Other gains registered by agriculture as a result of the AAA of 1933 were a rise in real estate values and a marked reduction in farm foreclosures and farm bankruptcies. Equally important were the benefits derived through the soil conservation efforts.<sup>85</sup>

The AAA of 1933 was oriented towards the short-range goal of raising the agricultural prices of certain basic commodities. Eventually others were added. The Jones-Connally Act of 7 April 1934 added rye, flax, barley,

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<sup>85</sup>Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 5 vols. (New York: Random House, 1938), Vol. 5: The People Approve, p. 137.

grain sorghums, cattle, and peanuts. The Warren Potato Act of 24 August 1935 added potatoes to the list.

The Jones-Costigan Act of 9 May 1934 made sugar beets and cane basic agricultural commodities. Since this Act amended the AAA, it made it possible to collect a processing tax on sugar with the proceeds being used to compensate those farmers who had held their production to the quota levels. It had the threefold goals of protecting the continental industry, of protecting the consumer by holding down the price of sugar, and of discouraging the expansion of the industry.<sup>86</sup>

Some impressive results were achieved in the sugar industry during the eighteen months that the industry operated under the Jones-Costigan Act. The objective of raising prices by holding down output was an unqualified success for the price received, for example, by sugar beet growers rose from \$5.26 per ton in 1932 and \$5.13 in 1933 to \$6.91 per ton in 1934 and \$6.90 in 1935. During this period the huge surplus of sugar was largely eliminated. At the same time, the incomes of not only

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<sup>86</sup>Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 5 vols. (New York: Random House, 1938), Vol. 3: The Advance of Recovery and Reform, pp. 85-90.

the farmers but also the field laborers increased. Also, child labor was practically eliminated from the sugar industry in the United States.<sup>87</sup>

The Bankhead Act, which also amended the AAA, was designed to use the taxing powers of the federal government to keep the overall production of cotton within the limits of the fixed national quota. This legislation was necessary because the increased farm population that resulted from a return to the farm by urbanites and because of the tendency of many farmers to cultivate more extensively suggested that the gains made from the 1933 voluntary cotton reduction program would be undermined.

The Bankhead Bill also aimed to prevent those few non-cooperating farmers who refused to sign contracts under the AAA of 1933 from impairing the effectiveness of the current cotton program. The effective period of the Act was to run from 1 June 1934 to 31 May 1935, with the President empowered to extend the period. A maximum national quota for the 1934-35 season was 10,000,000 bales of 500 pounds of lint cotton each. A tax fixed at 5.67 cents per pound of lint was levied on all excess cotton production.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 220-21.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

Another attempt to raise prices was made in October of 1933 when Roosevelt through Executive Order No. 6340 created the Commodity Credit Corporation. Initially capitalized at three million dollars, this amount was increased to one hundred million on 10 April 1936. These funds could be used by the Secretary of Agriculture to make loans on farm commodities if it was determined that the market was glutted and the additional commodities would further depress prices. The objective of the CCC was to contribute to the support of farm prices by enabling the producers to hold on to their products during periods of adverse marketing conditions.<sup>89</sup>

Jesse Jones, the director of the CCC, almost immediately began to make loans to the farmers on their 1933-34 crops. Between 18 October 1933 and 15 October 1937 about one million nine hundred and ninety thousand loans were made amounting to more than \$463,320,287.

The agricultural adjustment program was brought to a halt in January, 1936 when the Supreme Court made its ruling in the Hoosac-Mills case. The AAA was ruled unconstitutional on the basis that the processing fee constituted "expropriation of money from one group for the benefit of another" and was therefore voided. Since

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<sup>89</sup>Rosenman, Year of Crisis, p. 406.

the processing tax was an inseparable part of the scheme for effecting production control, it was declared void.<sup>90</sup>

The Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936 was passed soon after the Mills case so that the adjustment program could be continued. Though the objective of this measure had nominally different objectives from those of the AAA of 1933, much of the intent remained the same. Technically the new law differed from the old in that a change from a price objective to an income objective was being attempted in the new law. A stated purpose of the soil conservation law was to re-establish

. . . at as rapid a rate as the Secretary of Agriculture determines . . . the ratio between the purchasing power of the net income per persons on farms and that of the income per person not on farms that prevailed during the five year period August 1909-July 1914. . . .<sup>91</sup>

Although the major thrust of this Act was soil conservation and improvement, a major aim of it was the re-establishment of parity between farm and non-farm products. To accomplish this goal farmers were paid to grow soil-building and soil-conserving crops. With fewer money crops being produced, it was hoped that an offshoot of this would result in higher prices for farm products.

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<sup>90</sup>Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, p. 170.

<sup>91</sup>Benedict, Farm Policies, p. 350.

However, this program proved to be ineffective since it was a voluntary program, and the government was unable to control output.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 represented the third phase in the history of agricultural adjustment. The AAA of 1933 and the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act had been the first and second attempts, respectively. One area that this latest Act was concerned with was raising agricultural prices. The federal government would grant parity payments to those farmers who agreed to limit their production of certain commodities. The attempt here, as in previous legislation, was to give to the producer of the particular commodity a purchasing power equivalent to that commodity, but the parity price was redefined from the 1933 and 1936 laws. It was to reflect current interest payments per acre on farm indebtedness secured by real estate, tax payments per acre on farm real estate, and freight rates, as contrasted with such interest payments, tax payments, and freight rates during the base period.<sup>92</sup>

The cash farm income in 1939 rose from about 4.7 billion dollars in 1932 to about 8.5 billion dollars

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 354.



in 1939. Although the farmers had been able to buy only about 58 percent of the city goods in 1932 as compared to 1929, by 1939 they had regained the purchasing power held by them in the former year. Also, reflective of the gains made by the farmers was the rise in the value of farm real estate by about five billion dollars between 1932 to 1939. What is more is that the farm mortgage debt declined by two billion dollars during the same period.

#### The Rural Poor

In 1935 the rural poor in American were in dire straights. During this year over 900,000 farm families made less than four hundred dollars which included crops consumed at home. Five hundred thousand of these farm families lived on submarginal farms which consisted of a total of about 100,000,000 acres. At this point over forty-two percent of the American farmers did not own their land. These families tended to be over-burdened with debts, and in their efforts to produce more they abused the land even more.<sup>93</sup>

Using the authority granted to him by Congress under the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, Roosevelt established the Resettlement Administration

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<sup>93</sup>Rosenman, The Court Disapproves, pp. 144-45.

(RA) with the issuance of Executive Order No. 7027 on 1 May 1935. The motivation for the creation of the RA came from a realization that the bottom third of the farm population was a relief rolls during the depression, and this million farm families were getting poorer. Their predicament was such that, although they were farmers, they had to be supported by outside sources.

Among other things the RA was designed to meet the emergency of providing credit to destitute farmers. Involved in this program of rural rehabilitation were small loans that usually ranged from \$50 to \$600. They carried interest rates of five percent and were secured with liens being placed on crops and livestock. The RA could also make loans to groups of farmers for the purchase of large machinery which was beyond the capacity of the individual farmer to purchase.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, one of the main concerns of the RA was to give those poor farmers an opportunity to move off poor land to soil that was capable of producing crops that would yield a satisfactory income. The RA received too little money to carry out its assignment, which is suggestive of the conservative nature of the New Deal. Of the 500,000 families which

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

the RA had planned to move, only 4,441 were actually resettled. The purge of the liberals from the administration ended any attempts of class reform.<sup>95</sup>

However, some humanitarians were sensitive to the plight of the poor on the farms. Alabama's Senator Bankhead introduced legislation to help them in 1935. It aimed to make landowners out of tenants and laborers on the farm. When finally passed the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act of 1937 established the Farm Security Administration (which replaced the RA), extended loans to farmers to rehabilitate their lands, provided long-term, low interest loans to selected farmers to buy small farms, and also helped migrants by building sanitary labor camps.<sup>96</sup> The FSA was the first agency to provide real help for tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and migrants. By 1941 it had spent over a billion dollars. It also tried in earnest to help blacks living on farms.

The Farm Security Administration sought to provide assistance for hundreds of thousands of destitute and low income farm families through supervised loans and guidance in sound farming practices, through adjustment of farmers'

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<sup>95</sup>Leuchtenburg, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, P. 140.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., pp. 140-41.

debts, and where necessary, by direct subsistence grants. This program had allowed thousands of farmers to stay off relief and to remain self-supporting citizens.

Under the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act some 1800 loans averaging about \$5,000 were made during the first year of the program, 1937-1938. During the next fiscal year some 4,300 new loans averaging about \$5,500 were made. In the third year about 6100 loans were granted, and they averaged about six thousand dollars each. The competition for these loans was great for there were about twenty-two applicants for every loan granted. Of course, these loans sought to enable the rural poor to buy their own farms. The FSA was charged with the responsibility of administering the Act.

The last sop thrown to the poor on the farms was the food stamp plan passed in 1939. This program sought to promote the use of surplus foods among low-income families, and represented another attempt to relieve some of the burden of the farmers by removing some of the surplus crops off the market.

### Conservation

In addition to the credit and price enhancing schemes, the federal government sought to help agriculture through programs designed to conserve the national resources. Although there were various areas included in conservation

like the protection of wildlife and the development of hydroelectric power, major emphasis was placed on conserving and rebuilding the soils and on the rehabilitation of the range lands in the west. Related to these efforts were those which sought to deal with the problem of submarginal land.

The depletion of the soil began to be noticed as early as the Colonial Period but because so much empty land existed few persons crusaded in the interest of conservation. Shortly after the Superintendent of the Bureau of Census announced in 1890 that the frontiers in America were filled some important voices began to recognize the problem. Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt were two of the earlier supporters of conservation. During much of the Progressive Era, conservation of the nation's resources was important. However, the return of the Republicans to power during the twenties saw a reversal of the conservation movement. During the period of the Republican ascendancy the government displayed an exploitative attitude towards the nation's resources. The Teapot Dome scandal is an example of the government's complacent or exploitative attitude during the twenties.

The Hugh H. Bennett studies of the late twenties along with the dust storms of the 1930's finally brought home to America the problem of the poor state of her

land. They served to place the conservation of the soils high on the list of major objectives in national agricultural policy.

The Roosevelt administration made one of its first gestures towards conserving the farm lands when the Soil Erosion Service was established to administer funds allotted by Congress to carry out the erosion control program of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Subsections 202 and 203 of the NIRA, which dealt with soil erosion, aimed primarily at increasing employment.<sup>97</sup>

On 25 March 1935 the soil erosion work was transferred to the Department of Agriculture. With the various soil erosion programs under one department, a new umbrella agency called the Soil Conservation Service was created to direct these activities. Using labor from the CCC camps the Soil Conservation Service constructed check dams to stop soil erosion, planted trees and grass seed, and sloped steep banks.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup>National Industrial Recovery Act, Statutes at Large 48, secs. 202-302, 200-202 (1933).

<sup>98</sup>E. Louise Peffer, The Closing of the Public Domain: Disposal and Reservation Policies, 1900-1950 (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 237.

A significant step towards conservation was taken on 29 February 1936 when Congress passed the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act.<sup>99</sup> This law made soil conservation a major priority of the federal government. The responsibility for overseeing the program was the AAA's. The ruinously, low prices received by the farmers had forced them to engage in the over-intensive cultivation of their farms. In doing so their lands were terribly abused as evidenced by the dust storms and mud-laden streams. This loss in the fertility of the soil threatened the nation's future food supply. It had also been a contributing factor that caused farmers to either lose their land or to become tenants.

The goal of the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936 was the promotion of soil conservation measures that would check soil erosion and increase the fertility of the soil. Also, it sought to increase the total acreage devoted to soil-building and soil-conserving crops. This law provided for funds to be paid to those farmers who voluntarily agreed to plant erosion-preventing and soil-building crops rather than soil-depleting crops such as corn, cotton, and tobacco. Even though a primary

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<sup>99</sup>Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, Statutes at Large 49, sec. 7, 1148 (1936).

consideration for this measure had been to raise farm prices, it had an effect of placing agricultural conservation on a higher level of importance rather than conservation being an incidental by-product of the agricultural programs. It was an attempt to strike a balance between farm income, consumer requirements, and soil requirements.<sup>100</sup>

The logistics of the program provided for farm base acreages to be established for each farm voluntarily participating. Once that had been set a determination of the soil-depleting crop acreage was established and the farmers would receive payments in proportion to the amount of acreage they held out of production. About \$470,000,000 was appropriated by Congress for the program.

Among the accomplishments of this program were a reduced rate of exhausted soil, a better adjustment to demand of agricultural products, improved soil fertility, and less soil erosion. The total amount of acreage diverted from soil-depleting crops amounted to some 31,444,400 acres. Fifty-two million eight hundred sixty-three thousand acres were devoted to soil-building practices.

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid.



One of the areas that the Resettlement Administration had to concern itself with was conservation projects. It had become apparent to the federal government that the marginal and sub-marginal lands could be better utilized if they were taken out of crop production and used for more suitable purposes. In pursuance of this the government began to purchase these poorer lands so that they could be consolidated into units that might be large enough blocks to support agriculture. Also, these areas were converted into grazing districts, transferred to forest reserves, or otherwise reoriented. From the time the program was initiated until 30 June 1937, the title was acquired to about 17.5 million acres at a cost of about \$52,283,950.

The Western grazing lands had long been a sore spot in the national land program. By 1933 much of it was slowly eroding and becoming desert. Overgrazing of the land caused the soil cover to be eaten away and this tended to expose the soil to the elements. The lands were abused even more because since the title to it was held by the federal government, those who used it made few attempts to conserve the resources or to build up the fertility of the soil.

To remedy this situation the Taylor Grazing Act was passed by Congress on 28 June 1934.<sup>101</sup> There were three purposes given for passing the Taylor Grazing Act. One purpose that received a lot of attention was the stoppage of the injury done to the public grazing lands by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration. It sought to establish an orderly program of usage, improvement, and development of the public grazing lands. And lastly, it sought to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range. To accomplish this grazing districts were formed and permits were granted for the usage of the lands by a certain number of livestock and for specific seasons. These permits were purchased and the proceeds were to be distributed so that 25 percent of the fees would be used to improve the range and 50 percent of the money collected go for state and local governmental functions.

On 26 June 1936, Congress amended this law with measures that increased the number of acres in the grazing districts from eighty million to 142 million acres. Other provisions of this Act sought to contribute towards conservation methods for water development, soil erosion work, and the general improvements of the grazing lands.

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<sup>101</sup>Taylor Grazing Act, Statutes at Large 48, sec. 1, 1269 (1934).

The controversial Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933 was passed, in part, to contribute towards the conservation of the water and land resources of the Valley.<sup>102</sup> The program aimed at the control and proper use of the water resources through constructing dams that might control the flow and level of the river system. A by-product of water control is the conservation and preservation of the lands. Erosion control and reforestation on the steeper slopes had been carried on by the Authority's use of CCC labor. This resulted in having more than 701,631 farm acres reclaimed. Also, over half of a billion trees were planted to help stabilize the soil.

Title I of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938 which was approved by the Roosevelt Administration on the sixteenth of February retained the soil conservation and allotment features of the 1936 Act. It represented an improvement over the previous legislation in that measures were included to help water conservation and soil erosion controls in arid areas.

The conservation part of the AAA of 1938 is divided into two parts: the allotments of acreage among farmers

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<sup>102</sup>Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933, Statutes at Large 48, sec. 1, 58 (1933).

and the promotion of soil-building practices. Under this program a national acreage goal was to be figured out for each soil-depleting crop. These figures were derived by making careful estimates of market requirements and good soil practices, and were figured at rates sufficient to provide enough to satisfy the domestic needs, export needs, and reserve requirements.

The program was administered democratically and was voluntary. Once national limits were established each state would be assigned the privilege of producing a certain amount of the crop. Each state would then determine how much of the crop each county could produce. At this point, the farmers in each county would be told how much of the product he could produce and at what rate he would be paid to pursue the conservationist goals.

By 1939 great strides had been made in support of conservation. Some 41 million acres of land had been diverted to soil-conserving and soil-building crops. Forestry improvements had been carried out on about 350,000 acres. Also, other conservation efforts had been expended in contour farming, the building of dams, reseeding the range, and other practices.

## CHAPTER 3

### SOURCES INTERPRETING THE NEW DEAL

The historical phenomenon called the New Deal encompassed a litany of legislation passed by Congress to lead the nation out of the depression. Traditionally, it has been only during her war experiences that the government has passed such profound and far-reaching legislation that affected the lives of so many Americans. It is a topic that has generated hundreds of books, monographs, and articles on various aspects of the movement. And though the fruits of research by so many scholars have adequately chronicled the movement, not all of these are in agreement on its meaning.

The pundits, historians, scholars and others who study the past have not come to a consensus regarding the nature of the New Deal. At the time, and since, scholars have attempted to assess its nature, but they remain at odds on the subject. A major question concerning the movement that demands attention is: what was its relationship to earlier American reform movements? No definitive answer seems to be forthcoming, although to a certain extent it may be a problem of semantics. However, since a goal of the historian is

to find definitive answers, any interpretive account on the subject must be able to stand up to the test of time.

In the present chapter this writer will review a number of interpretive accounts that deal with the nature of the New Deal. These works have been grouped according to the interpretation presented by their authors. The first group will consist of those works in which the reform movement of the thirties has been interpreted as being revolutionary. The second group will include some of those works which deemed the New Deal to have been evolutionary, and the last group consists of those works which interpreted the movement as being conservative in nature.

#### Sources Interpreting the New Deal as Revolutionary

In his Pulitzer Prize winning book, entitled The Age of Reform, Richard Hofstadter has described the New Deal as representing a break from traditional reform movements. In a sub-heading that he labelled as "The New Departure," Professor Hofstadter alerts the reader to the fact "that absolute discontinuities do not occur in history." However, the author in referring to the New Deal goes on to state that

. . . what seems outstanding about it is the drastic new departure that it marks in the history of American reformism. The New Deal was different

from anything that had yet happened in the United States: different because its central problem was unlike the problems of Progressivism; different in its ideas and its spirit and its techniques.<sup>103</sup>

In developing his thesis, Professor Hofstadter sought to show that since the New Deal concerned itself with programs that were different from those confronting earlier reforms its nature was different. During the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian periods the goals were to prevent excessive taxation. To the reformers of these periods excessive or over-spending by the federal government was the cause of high taxes and therefore it should be halted. These reform movements also attempted to promote capitalism by making sure privileged charters were not granted.

Unlike Franklin Delano Roosevelt who took office when the nation was on the verge of a total economic collapse, the political leaders during the other reform periods initially encountered healthy economic conditions in America. Even though Jefferson in 1801, Jackson in 1829, Theodore Roosevelt briefly in 1907, and Wilson shortly before the wartime orders from Europe began

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<sup>103</sup>Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R. (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 303.

pouring into this country encountered brief economic setbacks; these earlier reform movements saw as part of their goal a greater sharing of the existing prosperity among the various socio-economic classes and not to save the economic system of the nation. The fundamental goal of the New Deal was to end the depression that faced the nation during the thirties through a comprehensive program calling for relief, recovery and reform.<sup>104</sup>

The problems faced by the Populists centered on checking the abuses of railroads and regulating big business. Similarly, the Progressives expended a large amount of energy on trying to defeat the bosses and machines. They also sought to control big business and to prevent monopolies from being established. On the other hand the New Deal focused its attention on re-establishing the economy. For Professor Hofstadter, since the reform movement of the thirties was seeking to restore the economy and other reforms were generally seeking to spread the wealth around, it became apparent that the nature of the New Deal would be different from other reforms.

Professor Hofstadter had identified yet another area which helped to set the New Deal off from previous

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 304.



reform movements. This area was the thinking engendered by the government during the Roosevelt Administration. Traditionally, the federal government had pursued a role of laissez faire regarding the citizenry. The role of the government during the early years of the Republic was one directed towards maintaining an orderly society. Later the role of the government became one of preventing those in positions of power from abusing those without. An example of this can be seen in the passage of the Interstate Commerce Act which sought to prevent abuses of the farmers by the railroads.<sup>105</sup>

However, the federal government during the New Deal played a positive role in which it intervened on behalf of her citizens. The neutral stance of the federal government was abandoned altogether during the thirties, and in this regard it represented a definite break with the past.

Examining The Age of Reform as it related to agriculture, the text will show that the New Deal instituted some fundamental changes. Prior to this even though the federal government had expressed sympathy for the farmers, very little legislation was passed by Congress that changed the status of the farmers. During the long period

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

of agricultural distress that lasted from about 1865 to the turn of the century, the federal government refused to pass any legislation that would provide the farmers with any measure of relief from their depressed prices. After a prosperous twenty year period following 1900, the prices received by farmers for their products began to drop again.

At this time, even though the Farm Bloc was powerful and the farm lobby in Washington was among the strongest special interest groups, the federal government still refused to pass the equalization fee and the export debenture plans, which were the two principal schemes designed to fix farm prices. But during the New Deal the government reversed its traditional aloofness and institutionalized the idea that agriculture in American represented "a special national interest requiring a special public policy". This new perception of agriculture led to the passage of legislation designed to maintain farm prices. Now a national goal for agriculture to establish parity of farm to non-farm prices during a base period was established.<sup>106</sup>

The New Deal intervened on behalf of the farmers in still another way that broke with tradition. Historically,

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-19.

the federal government and even the major farmers' organizations had displayed a neutral attitude (at best) regarding the farm poor which consisted of farmers on marginal land, tenants, migrants, and laborers. However, the work of the Resettlement Administration, and later the Farm Security Administration, sought to alleviate these sore spots in agriculture.<sup>107</sup>

In his voluminous The Shaping of the American Tradition, Professor Louis Hacker has presented an interpretation that is similar to that of Hofstadter. According to Hacker the legislation passed to fight the depression by the Roosevelt Administration constituted the third American Revolution ". . . not a revolution in the violent, turbulent sense, but a revolution nevertheless." During this reform period the federal government experienced a major change of mind regarding its role in support of the individual in society.<sup>108</sup>

Historically the federal government had maintained a position of laissez faire along Jeffersonian lines wherein it did not undertake any significant actions to advance the security or the welfare of the working

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>108</sup>Louis M. Hacker, "Third American Revolution," a chapter in his The Shaping of the American Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), p. 1125.

classes. On matters that dealt with the economic well-being of the masses the government had maintained a stance of aloofness which made it necessary for everyone to fend for himself during both good and bad times. But during the economically distressed thirties the government abandoned its traditional detachment and became the interventionist state that sought to provide a measure of security for its citizens.<sup>109</sup>

Under the Roosevelt Administration, agriculture received immediate and sustained attention. After analyzing what it understood to be the problems of agriculture, the New Deal set a number of goals for recovery and reform in this sphere. High on the list was the establishment of parity prices for farmers that would provide them with a balance of prices paid to those received. The base period adopted was that of August, 1909 to July, 1914. This goal of parity prices was later replaced with the goal of achieving for the farmers the relative income received by them during the pre-war years. During the Hundred Days, the government passed its first major act designed to accomplish the goals for farmers that it had established for itself. The Agricultural Adjustment Act

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

of 1933 sought to raise agricultural prices. A processing tax was implemented to pay for the program.<sup>110</sup>

In 1936, the Supreme Court ruled the AAA unconstitutional. To continue the basic AAA programs Congress rushed through to passage the temporary Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act until the AAA of 1938 could be prepared and passed. The Administration justified this legislation by arguing that the land resources of the nation needed to be protected.<sup>111</sup>

The Roosevelt Administration sought to achieve other goals through objectives that were interwoven with other programs. Laboring under the idea that production had a direct influence on prices, the adjustment of farm production to meet the domestic market requirements was adopted as a goal for agriculture. The conservation of the soil and the improvement of land use were also adopted as goals. The last goals established by the federal government were measures concerned with the economic status of the farmers: one of these sought to reduce their financial debts; the other sought rural relief for the traditional poor on the farms--the tenants, laborers, and those farmers living on submarginal lands.

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 1130

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 1131.

According to Hacker, the federal government in adopting these goals was embarking upon a bold, new course regarding agriculture. It was entering new areas with which it had heretofore not concerned itself.<sup>112</sup>

The goal of reducing the farmers' debt and providing protection against foreclosures on their mortgages was addressed in the passage of the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act and the Farm Mortgage Refinancing Act. This legislation provided mortgage protection for the farmers. It also encouraged those persons holding outstanding notes on farmers to grant them additional time to pay their notes.<sup>113</sup>

The rural poor--tenants, farm workers, migrants, and others--was another new area for the government. As noted in connection with another goal the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration sought to provide assistance to these groups.

The aforementioned works used to discuss the position of those historians who consider the New Deal to have been revolutionary are not isolated cases. Several other historians writing on the subject have come to the same general conclusion. Edgar Kemler in The Deflation

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 1130.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 1129.

of American Ideals presented a strong case against continuity.<sup>114</sup> Bernard Sternsher has published an article entitled, "The New Deal Revolution" in which he states that it was "a significant point of departure".<sup>115</sup> In a similar fashion Mario Einaudi in his book, The Roosevelt Revolution, discussed what he considered to be the vast and permanent changes brought about by the New Deal.<sup>116</sup> It should be noted, however, that none of the studies cited above were making reference to the agricultural program exclusively when they presented their characterizations of the New Deal.

#### Sources Interpreting the New Deal as Evolutionary

Upon reading sources like those written by Hofstadter and Hacker one would probably conclude that the New Deal broke with traditional reform movements. But if one reads from a second group of material it will become apparent to them that there is a second point of

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<sup>114</sup>Edgar Kemler, The Deflation of American Ideals: An Ethical Guide for New Dealers (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1941), p. 112.

<sup>115</sup>Bernard Sternsher, "The New Deal Revolution." Social Studies 57 (April 1960): 161.

<sup>116</sup>Mario Einaudi, The Roosevelt Revolution (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1977), p. 95.

view supported by an equally distinguished group of scholars. This paper will now focus upon those studies that interpreted the New Deal as being evolutionary in nature and examine the bases for their taking such a position.

In his article, "The Progressive Era in Perspective," Andrew M. Scott, professor of history at the University of North Carolina, was extremely critical of Hofstadter's book in particular and the contention that the New Deal was a revolutionary movement, in general. According to Scott's interpretation, it followed reform patterns established during the Progressive Era. It was not as Hofstadter claimed at variance with the Progressive Era and point by point Scott refuted that contention.<sup>117</sup>

Insofar as agriculture was concerned, the only pertinent criticism raised by Scott of Hofstadter's interpretation was soil conservation. Scott gave the New Deal full credit for putting the Tennessee Valley Authority and its soil conservation program into effect. But Scott noted that the idea originated from the 1909 Report of the National Conservation Commission appointed by

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<sup>117</sup>Andrew M. Scott, "The Progressive Era in Perspective", Journal of Politics 21 (November 1959): 685.



Theodore Roosevelt, and it reappeared in the Progressive platform of 1912.<sup>118</sup>

In perhaps what is the most dogmatic statement supporting the claim that the New Deal was evolutionary in nature, Henry Steele Commager specifically denied the revolutionary character of the New Deal. He states,

. . . we can now see that the "Roosevelt Revolution" was no revolution, but rather the culmination of half a century of historical development, and . . . the roots of the New Deal . . . go deep into our past.<sup>119</sup>

Contemporaries of the period who label the New Deal as being revolutionary did so for what appears to be very plausible reasons. The first of which was the "breathless rapidity" with which the New Deal legislation was enacted into law by Congress. An example of the rapid rate that new laws were enacted was the Hundred Days in which a veritable flood of major legislation like the AAA and TVA was passed by Congress.

The other reason why contemporaries felt a revolution was effected by the New Deal was because the attitude of the Roosevelt Administration of using the resources and powers of the federal government to aid and assist

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 695.

<sup>119</sup>Henry Steele Commager, "Twelve Years of Roosevelt", The American Mercury 60 (April 1945): 392.

the nation towards recovering from the depression was so different from that of the Hoover Administration. When Hoover occupied the White House, he displayed a distinct dislike for direct government assistance to individuals in society. His position was that the government should not dole out relief to the needy for it would destroy self-initiative. That made for a striking contrast with the Roosevelt Administration which adhered to a philosophy that maintained that every American should enjoy at least a minimum standard of living. If a contrast had been made between the Franklin Roosevelt Administration and that of one of the more progressive administrations like that of Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, or Wilson, then the New Deal would have appeared less revolutionary.<sup>120</sup>

For Commager much of the farm relief program enacted during the Roosevelt Administration had been anticipated and begun during the Populist and Progressive movements, maybe even earlier. Just what legislation he was speaking of is not identified but a search of the records does substantiate this claim.

With few exceptions agricultural prices in America experienced a continuous decline during the years from

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<sup>120</sup>Ibid., pp. 392-93.

about 1865 to the turn of the century. At that point the farmers began to enjoy a rare period of prosperity that came to an end with the cessation of hostilities in Europe, and with the peace reestablished the prices received by farmers began another decline that extended throughout the twenties. The farmers were by nature individualistic, but with their economy on the verge of bankruptcy they dropped their reluctance to call on the government for direct intervention.

Even though the federal government was not quite ready to intervene on a large scale during the Progressive Era, Congress did pass a minor piece of legislation designed to help the farmers. The Capper-Volstead Act was passed in 1922. This law helped the farmers by exempting agricultural cooperatives from the restrictions of the antitrust laws.<sup>121</sup>

Although they never became law before the advent of the New Deal, it is worthwhile to note the efforts of the farmers to raise domestic farm prices in the twenties by getting the government to enact the various schemes known as the Peek-Johnson plan, the McNary-Haugen plan, and the domestic allotment plan. The central idea behind the Peek-Johnson plan was to secure a fair exchange

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<sup>121</sup>Capper-Volstead Act, Statutes at Large 42, sec. 101, 18 (1922).

value for the crops produced by American farmers by releasing crops on the domestic market only in sufficient quantities that would meet the nation's needs and support the cost of production with a small profit. Those crops that could not be absorbed at a fair exchange rate were to be sold on the international market at world prices. Since each farmer contributed to the excess then each farmer should stand his share of the loss. These measures would result in a two-price value on the crops-- a domestic value and a world market value with the domestic levels somewhat higher than the world value.<sup>122</sup> Part of the importance of this plan lay in that it began to accustom the public to the notion that agriculture, like manufacturing and industry, should also be protected from foreign competition.

The spirit of the Peek-Johnson plan was later incorporated into the five McNary-Haugen bills that came before Congress between 1924 and 1928. Each of them sought to accomplish the same goal with variations of the same machinery. The general design of these bills called for government export corporations to be established for the eight basic commodities of wheat, corn, cotton, wool,

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<sup>122</sup>Wayne D. Rasmussen, ed., Readings in the History of American Agriculture (Urbana, Ill., University of Illinois Press, 1960), pp. 227-28.

cattle, sheep, swine, and rice. They would purchase the crops that could not be sold at the "ratio-price". At a later date this would become known as the "parity" price.

To raise prices to desirable levels the stabilization corporations would buy up the excess commodities and sell them abroad at whatever rate the world market would pay. The losses sustained by the corporations would be offset by charging an equalization fee to the producer of the commodity. This was deemed to be fair for it was the producers who benefitted from the two-price scheme. This plan would make it necessary to adopt tariff rates that were high enough to discourage the importation of commodities. The first three times the McNary-Haugen bills were voted on they failed to be passed by Congress. When versions of the bill did pass Congress in 1927 and in 1928, presidential vetoes blocked them from becoming law.

In the wake of the McNary-Haugen plan there emerged yet another two-price scheme known as the domestic allotment plan. This latest plan by the federal government to raise farm prices would pay producers a free trade price plus the tariff duty for their portion of the crop consumed on the domestic market, and the free trade price only for that part of the crop exported. This plan

contained the novel feature of making specific allotments to individual growers for them to grow a certain proportion of the crop for that particular season. The objective here was to prevent major surpluses from being grown. Variations of this plan were incorporated within the AAA of 1933 and the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act. The marketing agreement provision idea was incorporated within the AAA of 1933.<sup>123</sup>

The capstone of the pre-New Deal attempts to raise prices was the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929. Its avowed purpose was to place agriculture on a basis of equality with other industries through the promotion of effective merchandising of agricultural commodities in interstate and foreign commerce. The Act established a Federal Farm Board consisting of eight members who oversaw a revolving fund of \$500 million dollars. Using this fund it could make loans to farmers' cooperatives, not individual farmers, at rates of no more than four percent.<sup>124</sup> Under this program the federal government hoped to resolve the agricultural crisis through the usage of farmer-controlled cooperative associations.

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<sup>123</sup> Benedict, Farm Policies, pp. 268-69.

<sup>124</sup> Agricultural Marketing Act, Statutes at Large 46 secs. 1-2, 11-12, (1929).

The Agricultural Marketing Act also contained a stabilization corporation feature for certain commodities like wheat, corn, and cotton. This program was designed to provide facilities where particular commodities which had surpluses could be bought, stored, and held off the market until a favorable price could be received. Capital for this program came from the revolving fund and losses suffered by the stabilization corporations were to be absorbed by the fund.<sup>125</sup>

It can not be ascertained whether farm credit was one of the areas that Professor Commager alluded to when he made reference to the New Deal agricultural relief program being anticipated by earlier reform movements. Nevertheless, one can find forerunners and programs similar to those pursued in the New Deal.

On 17 July 1916, Congress initiated its first step towards establishing the federal farm credit system. It passed legislation authorizing both a cooperative system of twelve federal land banks and a system of joint-stock land banks to be established with private capital and allowed to make profits. Both of these types of banks were to be placed under the supervision of the Federal Farm Loan Board. Regardless of which of the two

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid., sec. 9, 15-16.

plans were used the amortization plan of repayment was required. Also, a limit was placed on the amount of interest that could be charged.<sup>126</sup>

A more substantial credit measure passed by Congress to help the farmers was the Agricultural Credits Act of 1923. It established a government owned, operated, and controlled system of Federal Intermediate Credit Banks in each city where a Federal Land Bank was located. Each intermediate bank received funds from the federal treasury for capital stock. Additional funds were to be provided by selling collateral debentures on the financial market. These new banks could make loans to cooperative associations but not directly to the farmers. The farmer could then secure his loan through these credit agencies on very favorable interest terms. The intermediate banks could also discount agricultural paper submitted by agricultural finance corporations, livestock loan companies, and local banks so that the farmer's debts might be reduced.<sup>127</sup>

The last major effort to provide credit to the farmers prior to the New Deal came with the establishment

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<sup>126</sup>Federal Farm Loan Act, Statutes at Large 39, secs. 3-4, 360-64 (1916).

<sup>127</sup>Federal Farm Loan Act, Statutes at Large 42, secs. 201-205, 1454-57 (1923).



of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation which was empowered to make loans to finance agriculture. The RFC established regional agricultural credit corporations in each Federal Land Bank district to make emergency loans to the lending agencies which usually provided the farmers with loans. When Roosevelt took office these banks were absorbed into the Farm Credit Administration.<sup>128</sup>

Unquestionably, Commager saw Roosevelt's conservation program, especially as it pertained to the soil, as a continuation of earlier reform programs designed to protect the resources of America. Congress passed the Carey Act on 18 August 1894 to encourage the improvement of the soil resources. This law gave one million acres of land to each state containing arid land on condition that the state provide for the necessary reclamation. The Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902 was a further step taken on behalf of soil conservation that would help farmers in particular. This law marked a significant change in American land policy: it set up an irrigable land program designed for the West; it provided interest free funds for such development; it brought up the

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<sup>128</sup>Reconstruction Finance Corporation, Statutes at Large 47, secs. 1-3, 5-6 (1932).

question of government versus private production of hydroelectricity; and, it implied more direct involvement by the federal government in protecting the land resources of the nation.<sup>129</sup>

When the New Deal initiated its policy of direct intervention on behalf of agriculture the government may have gone further than previous administrations, but not all of the ideas incorporated into the legislative acts were novel. Whereas the parity price level as sought in the AAA of 1933 wanted to raise prices to a certain base period, the ratio price included in the Peek-Johnson and McNary-Haugen attempted to do the same thing. The idea of raising prices through restricting production as designed in the AAA was first attempted in the domestic allotment plan proposed in the late twenties. The program attempting to raise prices, through holding crops off the market by providing farmers with governmental loans certainly should not be considered new. It had originally been proposed in the late 1880's in the Sub-treasury Plan, and later it was included in the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929. If the AAA had its processing fee, the McNary-Haugen plan had its equalization fee.

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<sup>129</sup>Commager, "Twelve Years of Roosevelt," p. 392.

The conclusion that one must come to in connection with the several price raising schemes is that even though some New Deal programs may have been enacted into law for the first time, many of them had been proposed earlier even though they may not have been passed.

Just as Hofstadter and Hacker were supported by other historians in their contention on the nature of the New Deal. Commager and Scott are not alone in their interpretation. The noted historian, Walter Lippman, agrees with the latter group. He argued that Roosevelt's program for agriculture was not new for he states that "all the main features of the Roosevelt program were anticipated by Mr. Hoover". Contrary to what one may think of the Quaker Hoover, it was during his Administration that the principle of laissez faire was dropped and the government abandoned the idea that depressions must be overcome by private adjustment.<sup>130</sup>

In an unparalleled program it was Hoover who used the machinery of the federal government to intervene on the behalf of agriculture. He did so in several ways; he used the government credit to strengthen the capital of Federal land banks, to lend money to farmers' cooperatives to protect farm prices through marketing schemes and to prevent foreclosures.

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<sup>130</sup>Walter Lippman, The New Imperative (New York: Mac-Millan Company, 1935), p. 649.

Professor Lippman did not consider Roosevelt to have been very different from Hoover for "in their relations to agriculture . . . there is no sharp break between the two Administrations". Both felt agriculture to be disadvantaged to industry where the tariff was concerned since the products purchased by them were protected and the crops they sold were not. In a sense this amounted to a tax on the farmers. Both men as president employed the same general principles to resolve the problem. Both sought to regulate the supply of crops through the use of governmental funds. Each recognized that a satisfactory domestic solution to be unlikely, and both encouraged foreign sales. Neither wanted to encourage more agricultural sales abroad by reducing the tariff on industrial goods. Lastly, each supported pegging farm prices and encouraging less production.<sup>131</sup> The biggest difference between the two Administrations from Lippman's perspective seemed to be the apparatus to be used to bring about the desired results.

#### Sources Interpreting the New Deal as Conservative

A last school of historians who have interpreted the New Deal are those who considered it to have been a

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 655.

conservative movement. In "The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform", Barton Bernstein disagreed with those historians who have charged that the New Deal marked a watershed in American history. It is his contention that during the New Deal some important pieces of legislation were enacted into law, but they wrought no basic or fundamental changes in the way of life of most Americans. When Congress did enact some measure to combat the depression it did so only when it had to and even then it was only the least amount of legislation that would deter citizens from taking more drastic actions. When Congress passed legislation it was seeking to vent an explosive situation and not bent on changing society.<sup>132</sup>

The essence of Bernstein's argument was that the New Deal was "profoundly conservative." That is not to say that nothing unique developed from it, but it is intended to suggest that when the whole Roosevelt program is studied one will find it weighted on the side of continuity and being conservative. The author states,

The liberal reforms of the New Deal did not transform the American system; they conserved and protected American corporate capitalism; occasionally by absorbing parts of threatening programs. There was no significant redistribution of power in

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<sup>132</sup>Barton J. Bernstein, ed., Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 264.

American society, only limited recognition of other organized groups, seldom of unorganized peoples. Neither the bolder programs advanced by New Dealers nor the final legislation greatly extended the beneficence of government beyond the middle classes or drew upon the wealth of the few for the needs of the many. Designed to maintain the American system, liberal activity was directed towards essentially conservative goals.<sup>133</sup>

What this portended for the farmers of America was that changes would be few and the result nominal.

Roosevelt's program was not very different from that of Hoover's. Both abandoned the position of laissez faire in government. Hoover, like his successor, backed commodity stabilization corporations for the major commodities. Nevertheless, prices continued to fall and these corporations continued to run out of funds. When Roosevelt moved to help the farmers, the AAA was designed to help the larger growers. All too many times its programs harmed the lesser farmers and farm workers. These smaller farmers and poorer people of the farms frequently had their lands taken out of production and in many instances were driven off the farm. The AAA sacrificed the interest of the poorer and marginal farmers for the welfare of those with greater political

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

and economic power. "Though the government served as a mediator of interest and sometimes imposed its will in divisive situations, it was generally the servant of powerful groups".<sup>134</sup>

Professor Arthur S. Link of Princeton University is another historian who has interpreted the New Deal as being primarily conservative in character. In The American Epoch he states "the chief significance of the reform legislation of the 1930's was its essentially conservative character". Upon entering the office of the presidency Roosevelt did not have any grand plan of action to work towards. However, the obvious tasks of conserving human and natural resources, restoring prices for agriculture, manufacturers, and businessmen, and to assure a fair distribution of goods and incomes had to be addressed by the new Administration. To accomplish this the workers, farmers, businessmen, and government would have to work together.<sup>135</sup>

There is no doubt that Professor Link saw the New Deal as another manifestation of reform that was in line with earlier reform movements. The AAA to the author

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>135</sup>Arthur S. Link, The American Epoch (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), p. 401.

represented a logical culmination of policies designed to help agriculture that dated back to Wilson's Administration. All of its important features had long been discussed and supported by farm groups. It should be noted, too, that the organized farmers and the more substantial farmers benefitted most from the AAA. Professor Link did acknowledge the work of the Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration but reserved judgment on them. However, he stated,

In the long run, however, the economic results of the first AAA program were not as significant as its political implications . . . that the organized farmers who benefitted most . . . were a powerful pressure group.<sup>136</sup>

The author considered the Tennessee Valley Authority, along with its conservation feature, to have been significant. But even here it was a rather conservative measure with roots that date back to the Progressive Era. A reading of Professor Link's account of the New Deal gives every indication that it was a movement designed to protect and to conserve, not to change.

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 405-07.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE GOVERNMENT AND FARM PROBLEMS

In a study of this type in which interpretations have been made, it is important that some criterion or medium of measurement be used as a basis for justifying the positions taken by each school of thought. Therefore, this section has been included to provide a measure to show the extent to which the government went towards resolving the farm problems before and during the New Deal.

#### The Federal Government and Farm Mortgage and Credit Assistance

With the crash of the stock market prices in 1929, the already desperate situation of the farmers became untenable. Due in part to the decline of farm prices, coupled with the depressed state of the economy, farmers began to lose their farms en masse. Between 1930 and 1934 nearly one million farmers lost their lands due to foreclosures. In their attempts to stave off these proceedings, the farmers turned to the banks for credit but to no avail. Credit was all but impossible for them to obtain because of the large number of bank failures and suspensions. Also, the banks in their quest to obtain more liquid capital became quite selective in the granting of loans. In 1930, some 1,295 banks failed;

in 1931 another 1,031 banks failed; corresponding figures for 1932 and 1933 are 2,935 and 4,546, respectively.<sup>137</sup> During the same period a total of 9,106 banks suspended their operations. While these figures may not appear to be significant, their total impact might be better understood when it is realized that the total number of banks shrank by about half between 1920 and 1933. The figures for these two years are 30,909 and 14,771, respectively.<sup>138</sup>

Coinciding with the farmers' need for mortgage assistance was a need for more and cheaper sources of credit. This had been a major concern of the farmers since the launching of the Republic. The federal government's initial method of disposing of land came in the form of the Ordinance of 1785. After surveying the land and marking it off the government would offer 640 acres or more to the perspective buyer for a minimum price of one dollar per acre. No credit arrangements were available.

Change was not long in coming for in 1787 an amendment was passed providing credit arrangements of a scant nature. These called for a third of the money to be paid at the time of purchase and the balance becoming due at the end of three months. The Land Act of 1796

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<sup>137</sup>Historical Statistics, p. 109.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 1038.

liberalized the credit arrangements somewhat by allowing the purchaser to pay one-twentieth of the total down, complete payment of half the price in thirty days, and the remainder within one year. However, these terms were still out of the range of the average settler.<sup>139</sup>

The Harrison Land Act of 1800 provided slight improvements in the terms of federal lands. As in the 1796 land act the minimum price per acre was two dollars but the buyer had to pay only one fourth of the price in the first forty days with the balance to be paid in three annual payments at six percent interest. This pattern of easing credit terms in the purchasing of federal land continued over the next twenty years until the Land Law of 1820 reversed it by not offering any credit.

Insofar as credit and banking were concerned those with agricultural interest got off to an inauspicious beginning with the federal government when the first Bank of the United States was proposed in 1791. The farmers showed a distrust towards the Bank as a monied monopoly. This suspicion led to an abandonment of the Bank, but a second Bank of the United States was soon chartered. However, quarrels between the president of the Bank, Nicholas Biddle, and President Jackson led to its demise.

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<sup>139</sup>Benedict, Farm Policies, p. 13.

In a nation already drained of much of its bullion, the "Specie Circular" of Andrew Jackson, instituted on 11 July 1836, proved to be a burden on the farmers for it called for lands to be paid for in specie. Together these caused public land purchases to decline from twenty million dollars in 1836 to one million dollars in 1840.

Over the course of the next twenty years the federal government embarked on a gradual course that culminated in a practical give-away of the land. First the military bounty system gave 160 acres to any person who served in the armed services after 1790. Between 1776 and 1855 the federal government disposed of 73,485,399 acres in this fashion. The Preemption Act and the Graduation Act made land easier to acquire by opening the frontier up for sale and lowering its price. The capstones of this policy were the Homestead Act of 1862 and the land grants to railroads. The former act allowed 160 acres to the persons who qualified and lived on the land for five years. Under the latter act Congress by 1865 had given the railroads some 102,272,573 acres of land.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> John T. Schlebecker, Whereby We Thrive: A History of American Farming 1607-1972 (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1975), pp. 63-67.

Prior to 1860 those persons in agriculture centered their interest on banking and credit problems. Following the Civil War, however, their attentions concentrated on monetary issues like that involving greenbacks, inflated dollars, and the monetization of silver. As the twentieth century opened the issue had still not been resolved to the satisfaction of the farmers. As time progressed people in government became more receptive to agriculture's need for credit. In the 1912 election all three parties included planks in their platform to this end. The upshot of this activity was the passage of legislation by Congress on 17 July 1916 which established the federal land bank system. It was to be administered by the newly established Federal Farm Loan Board. With this Act Congress had laid the cornerstone of what would eventually become an extensive federal farm credit system.

The Federal Land Banks and joint-stock land banks were organized pursuant to the Federal Farm Loan Act of 1916 and became lenders in the farm mortgage field. The growing influence of these banks are illustrated in the following figures which cites the debts owed to them: 1917--\$41,000,000; 1919--\$353,633,000; 1921--\$508,540,000; 1923--\$1,190,424,000; 1925--\$1,544,111,000; 1927--\$1,814,782,000; 1929--\$1,839,521,000; and 1931--\$1,733,172,000.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Statistical History, p. 287.

The federal government's first step in granting non-real-estate agricultural credit came in 1918 in the wake of huge crop failures in the Northwest and Southwest. The government provided five million dollars for relief, and periodically throughout the twenties the Congress in special acts continued to make loans to the areas hurt by crop failures. However, these efforts had no permanence about them. That did not come until Congress passed the Agricultural Credit Act of 1923.

This measure of 1923 was Congress' first effort to sponsor a federally run credit agency for making non-real-estate loans to agriculture. It created the Federal intermediate credit banks which made loans to agricultural credit corporations, and cooperatives. Over the next few years these banks provided loans in increasing amounts. Figures for selected years are: 1923--\$9,105,000; 1926--\$38,976,000; 1929--\$47,283,000; and 1932--\$79,658,000.<sup>142</sup>

The first New Deal measure that hinted towards assisting the farmers with credit or mortgage relief was Executive Order No. 6084 which was issued by the president on 27 March 1933. It created the Farm Credit Administration to encourage economy and increased efficiency among

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

the agencies providing credit rather than to grant monies to the farmers. With the exception of the first two years the loans granted under the agency fluctuated very little over the next few years. The following figures illustrate this point: 1933--\$1,147,014,000; 1935--\$2,564,179,000; 1937--\$2,989,019,000; 1939--\$2,862,855,000; and 1941--\$2,642,333,000.<sup>143</sup>

The legislation which did provide for monies to salvage the farmers' mortgages was Title II of the AAA of 1933 which was called the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act of 1933. As its title implies this Act sought to meet the most pressing agricultural emergency of the time. Besides lowering the rate of interest on all land bank loans from an average rate of 5.4 percent as it stood in 1932 to 4.5 percent, this measure provided two billion dollars for the refinancing of farm mortgages held by mortgagees other than the federal land banks and two hundred million dollars for land bank commissioners for rescue loans. The amount of money loaned out under this program during the New Deal fluctuated between a low of \$1,147,000,000 in 1933 to a high of \$2,989,000,000 in 1937.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 286.

<sup>144</sup>Historical Statistics, p. 491.

Under the Farm Credit Act of 1933, the work of the intermediate credit banks was enhanced with a stronger identity caused by the establishment of a Commissioner who functioned solely within the sphere of making production and marketing loans. The work of these two agencies continued but the amount of monies loaned out began to decline. The following figures depict this decline: 1934--\$60,381,000; 1936--\$46,962,000; 1938--\$39,974,000; and 1940--\$32,316,000.<sup>145</sup>

The Farm Credit Act also created production credit associations which allowed for an adequate local mechanism whereby the intermediate credit banks could reach and serve the individual farmer. The following figures illustrate the support provided to farmers involved with this program: 1933--\$27,000 (this was the first year this program operated); 1935--\$93,400,000; 1937--\$136,918,000; and 1939--\$153,425,000.

The federal government's efforts to provide credit for farmers were initiated on 17 July 1916 with the federal farm credit system being launched. This measure was supplemented with the Agricultural Credit Act and the agricultural provisions provided in the RFC. During the New Deal additional credit measures for agriculture

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<sup>145</sup>Statistical History, p. 287.



came with the Farm Credit Act, the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, and the Federal Farm Mortgage Corporation Act. In examining the policies pursued by the federal government prior to and during the New Deal definite foundations can be found in the Federal Land Banks and the joint-stock land banks that would be expanded during the thirties.

#### The Federal Government and Farm Prices

On the eve of the New Deal (1932) the prices received by farmers for the commodities they sold as opposed to the prices they paid stood at a parity ratio of 58. The parity ratio is the quotient (multiplied by 100) obtained by dividing the index of prices received by farmers by the index of prices paid by them. If the ratio rose above 100 it indicated that farmers' purchasing power had risen over the base period (1909-1914). If the ratio was below 100 it indicated the farmers' purchasing power had declined below the base period. Between 1910 and 1942 the parity ratio favored the farmers in only six of these years-- 1910, 1914, 1916, 1917, 1918, and 1919. The following set of figures indicates the trend regarding the status of the farmers: 1910--107; 1913--101; 1916--103; 1919--110; 1922--87; 1924--89; 1927--88; 1930--83; and in 1933

it stood at 64. Obviously the farmers were in need of some type of relief from the depressed prices that they were receiving.<sup>146</sup>

This depressed state of agriculture was not new to the farmers, for from 1870 to 1917 the parity ratio sank almost continuously. After rising above parity during the war years, the depressed state of agriculture returned with peace. Insofar as the federal government's role in supporting farm prices was concerned, prior to the New Deal it had done little to assist agricultural prices. A tentative step was taken on 22 February 1922, when the Capper-Volstead Cooperative Marketing Act was passed. By exempting farm organizations like cooperatives from the provisions in the Clayton Anti-Trust Act, it sought to improve the conditions under which farm products were marketed.<sup>147</sup>

The major piece of pre-New Deal legislation which sought to raise farm prices was the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929. It was the only measure in which the federal government committed funds in order to accomplish its desired objective. In 1930 the government paid a total of \$3,879,000 to support those crops covered by the programs, \$2,622,000 in 1931, and \$2,078,000 in 1932.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup>Historical Statistics, p. 489.

<sup>147</sup>Capper-Volstead Act, Statutes at Large 42 (1922).

<sup>148</sup>Historical Statistics, p. 486.

During the New Deal the government conducted price supported programs for a number of agricultural products. These programs were designed to provide farmers with a parity-ratio on certain commodities by using orderly production and marketing practices. The price supports were authorized through nonrecourse loans and purchase agreements with farmers or by purchases from processors and others. The government would get its money by storing the goods until the need or marketing conditions allowed for their disposal.

The basic principle incorporated in legislation passed during the Roosevelt Administration to raise farm prices was a reduction in farm production.<sup>149</sup> In adopting this strategy the federal government was reversing its historic pattern of encouraging and supporting the farmers to produce more. This feature was included in each of the four major acts passed during the New Deal--the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, the Commodity Credit Corporation, the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, and the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938. The Bankhead Cotton Act, Jones-Connally

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<sup>149</sup> Broadus Mitchell, Depression Decade: From New Era Through New Deal, 1929-1941 (White Plains, N. Y.: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1975), p. 185.

Act, Warren Potato Act, and the Jones-Costigan Act added other commodities to that group of crops whose prices were being raised.<sup>150</sup> The programs have been described (pp. 49-51), now an attempt will be made to analyze the results and compare them with earlier efforts. The gross receipts from commercial market sales as well as the net from Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) loans were as follows: 1933--\$5,332,000,000; 1935--\$7,120,000,000; 1937--\$8,864,000,000; and 1939--\$7,072,000,000.<sup>151</sup>

The CCC was established on 17 October 1933 to stabilize, support, and protect farm income and prices; assist the maintenance of balanced and adequate supply of agricultural commodities; and facilitate their orderly distribution. What the farmers sought was to be able

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<sup>150</sup>For a discussion of these programs see the following sources: Edwin Nourse, et al., Three Years of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (Washington, D. C.: Brookings Institution, 1937); Edwin G. Nourse, Marketing Agreements Under the AAA (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1935); Murray R. Benedict and Oscar C. Stine, The Agricultural Commodity Programs: Two Decades of Experience (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1956).

<sup>151</sup>Historical Statistics, p. 486.

to keep their crops off the market until higher prices could be had. The program was set up and designed to provide loans to farmers who had participated in the AAA program. The farmer would be required to deposit his storable commodity with the CCC. The value of the loans made were as follows: 1934--\$260,000,000; 1935--\$311,000,000; 1936--\$29,000,000; 1937--\$1,000,000; 1938--\$280,000,000; 1939--\$457,000,000; and 1940--\$308,000,000.<sup>152</sup>

The federal government's practice of providing price supports began in 1929 with the Agricultural Marketing Act, but was greatly expanded during the thirties. The AAA of 1933, the CCC, the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, and the AAA of 1938 resulted in general price rise. That rise is shown in the following figures: 1934--75; 1935--88; 1936--92; 1937--93; 1938--78; 1939--77; and 1940--81.<sup>153</sup>

#### The Federal Government and the Farm Poor

Even without a depression there were bound to be some farmers who, for one reason or the other, were not

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p. 488. The figure of one million dollars for 1937 is not a mistake. This writer cannot explain the disparity.

<sup>153</sup>Statistical History, p. 283.

able to prosper in proportion to other farmers. It could have been due to bad management practices, the lack of initiative, or some other reason, but there were many in this situation on the eve of the New Deal, just as there had been since the Colonial period.

Prior to the New Deal the federal government had not undertaken any significant measure that was designed specifically to help this group of rural poor--the sharecroppers, tenants, those living on poor soils, etc. However, this would change during the New Deal. On 1 May 1935, Executive Order No 7027 created the Resettlement Administration. This new entity sought to move destitute farm families on to better lands and to provide them with technical and financial assistance. Those families removed were to be given aid in the form of more suitable rented or purchased farms. Under this program by 30 June 1937, options were taken out on about 17.5 million acres and titles were acquired on about 12 million acres. By this date the government had spent \$52,283,950.<sup>154</sup>

The work of the Resettlement Administration was taken over by the Farm Security Administration on 1 September 1937. This program called for loans to the rural poor

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<sup>154</sup>Benedict, Farm Policies, p. 325.

seeking to buy farms, the granting of rehabilitation loans, and the retirement of submarginal lands. Under the submarginal land retirement program the government spent ten million dollars in 1938 and twenty million dollars for each of the years, 1939 and 1940.<sup>155</sup> In rendering the type of services to the farmers as described above, the federal government was helping in ways that it never had before. However, it should be added that the programs embarked upon in this sphere were neither widespread, nor did they undertake to redistribute the land on a more equitable basis.

#### The Federal Government and Conservation

It was realized very early during the Colonial period that the methods used by the farmers were causing the soils of the nation to be depleted of their nutrients. This was known because after just a few years of growing crops in a particular field, the yields diminished with each succeeding season. It was known also because they saw tons of topsoil being washed downriver after each rain. The fact is many settlers had begun to consider the time when they would have to abandon their farms

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., pp. 362-63.

for the more fertile lands that still lay covered with forests even before they had finished clearing their present farms.

For these early pioneer farmers it appeared easier to move on to virgin lands than to practice the relatively expensive methods of scientific farming which entailed the use of fertilizers and crop or field rotation. Although most of these early farmers might be excused since it was not in vogue during the period and the methods of scientific farming was not widely publicized, still the abuse of the land went on unabated and with each passing season more and more land was damaged.

It was not until around 1900 that any substantial interest was shown in conservation by either the federal government or the people of this nation. This attitude prevailed for many reasons, but one of them was the almost universal belief that the country was so vast that the natural resources were limitless. In 1890 when the Superintendent of the Bureau of Census announced that the frontier in America had been filled, it served to alert the nation to reconsider this ill-conceived idea. With the coming of the Populists-Progressives some reformers began to beckon for change regarding the country's policy concerning conservation.



The federal government's first step towards protecting and preserving soil resources was taken with the Desert Land Act of 1877. This law was designed to correct part of the arid land problems in the western United States by allowing settlers to buy 640 acres at a minimum price of twenty-five cents per acre, if they would irrigate the land within three years after filing claims. This law did not accomplish all the goals set for it by Congress, for by 1900 only 11,000 of the 37,000 claims filed had been proven. By 30 June 1925 claims amounting to 32,573,970 acres, and proofs of compliance had been filed on another 8,579,664 acres.<sup>156</sup> When this figure is contrasted with the total it may not appear to be substantial, but its true significance lies in the realization that it launched the federal government onto the road of being the protector of soil resources.

The Act of 2 October 1888 was a cautious step towards conservation. It provided for the identification of lands that might be reclaimed by means of irrigation. It also reserved as property of the United States government those arid lands in the West that were suitable for saving through the usage of reservoirs, ditches, and canals.

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<sup>156</sup>Schlebecker, Whereby We Thrive, p. 145.

A bolder piece of conservation legislation was the Forest Reserve Act of 1891. This law authorized the president to withdraw from public entry forest lands owned by the government and designate them as permanent forest reserves. Using the authority granted to them under this Act, Presidents Harrison, Cleveland, and McKinley set aside 46,828,429 acres.<sup>157</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt's greatest contribution to this nation as president was his work in conservation. His major conservation interests were the protection of navigable waters, the control of forest fires, governmental control of cutting timber, and the retention by the government of underground mineral rights. Even though the protection of soil was secondary to him, some progress was made in this area. He initially withdrew over 125 million acres from public entry. Soon pressures against conservation began to surface, especially from western states arguing that these measures were stifling their development. After encountering opposition to his conservation measures, Roosevelt quickly withdrew an additional sixteen million acres from public entry before

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<sup>157</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

Congress negated his power to do so. Between 1906 and 1907 the total reserves had been increased by 44 million acres.<sup>158</sup>

On 18 August 1894, Congress passed the Carey Act in an effort to strengthen the Desert Land Act and the Act of 2 October 1888.<sup>159</sup> It provided one million acres be given to each state containing arid lands if that state would provide the means by which it could be reclaimed. This Act led to 1,158,926 acres of land being patented by 30 June 1925. By this date 3,843,290 acres had been set aside and another 264,850 acres had patents pending.

The Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902 marked a turning point in American land policy. This Act was important because of several reasons: for the first time a policy specifically designed for the irrigable, arid lands in the West was established; the government provided interest-free loans to develop such lands; the government committed itself as never before to such a program of soil conservation; and it raised as an issue the question of government versus private production of hydroelectric power.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>159</sup> Benedict, Farm Policies, pp. 125-26.

This Act established a revolving fund derived from the sale of public land that could contribute towards the construction of storage and power dams, as well as for the canal systems necessary under the irrigation programs. With the proceeds received under this program, twenty-five such projects had been started by 1925. Among these were the Salt River Project in Arizona and the Roosevelt, Hoover, Grand Coulee, Bonneville, Shasta, and Friant Dams. Also, by 1915 the federal government had spent more than eighty million dollars on these projects.

The significance of this Act is derived from the knowledge that even though the idea of using governmental funds to develop and protect the soil resources was not new, it marked the first time that governmental funds to subsidize such projects were authorized. It was new also because it sought to get the farmers to help defray the cost of the program.

President Taft, like Roosevelt when he was in the White House, supported conservation measures. Woodrow Wilson as president did little in the area of conservation. During the Republican Ascendancy conservation suffered from setbacks as Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover supported industry.

The published report of Hugh H. Bennett of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, the propaganda campaign of the Soil Conservation Service, and the dust bowl of the early thirties helped to change the public's attitude regarding conservation. In response to these and other factors Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act of 28 June 1934 which sought to improve upon the Desert Land Act. This law empowered the president to withdraw from public entry lands that were not suited for farming and to control soil erosion. About eighty million acres were initially brought under government control for grazing purposes. In 1935, President Roosevelt withdrew essentially all of the public domain from public entry; this amounted to about 166 million acres. The next year Congress completed the task of protecting the remaining portions of the public domain by removing 142 million acres of grazing districts from public entry. In essence the open range had been permanently closed.<sup>160</sup>

The Tennessee Valley Authority was established on 18 May 1933, as a multifaceted agency. The general idea was to economically transform the Valley through measures that provided for flood control through a dam constructing

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<sup>160</sup>Schlebecker, Whereby We Thrive, p. 296.

program. These dams would produce cheap electricity as well as fertilizers. Insofar as agriculture and conservation were concerned it would contribute by easing the flooding and preventing the rampaging waters from washing away topsoils. Test or demonstration farms revealed methods of rebuilding soils. A million acres were planted in cover crops, another million acres were turned into pasture land, and another million acres were terraced.<sup>161</sup>

On 25 March 1935 Roosevelt formed a new agency called the Soil Eorsion Service through executive order. This action was sanctioned by Congress on 27 April 1935 without a dissenting vote in either the House or the Senate. Also in this year Congress expanded the Civilian Conservation Corps. The work of these two groups was directed towards saving the soil. During 1935 these groups built 294,000 check dams, seeded 82 million square yards of gully banks, sloped 58 million yards of gully banks, and completed 29 million linear feet of diversion ditches. A shelterbelt program in which hundreds of millions of drought-resistant trees were planted up and down the

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<sup>161</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 375.

length of the Great Plains during the New Deal was aimed at cutting down on the amount of soil that was being blown and washed away by the elements.<sup>162</sup>

Under an ever-expanding program of conservation on 1 May 1935, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 7027 which established the Resettlement Administration, in part to carry out certain land conservation projects. In this action the federal government began to purchase and retire marginal and submarginal farm lands from families who had been the recipients of them as practically gifts during the homesteading days. These lands were generally held by poorer farmers who were trying to scratch out an existence on them. This program of retiring such lands was later continued under Title III of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act. For the fiscal year ending 30 June 1938 the government had appropriated ten million dollars for this work and another twenty million dollars for the two succeeding years. On 1 September 1937, the Secretary of Agriculture transferred the land retirement program to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>Schlebecker, Whereby We Thrive, p. 260.

<sup>163</sup>Benedict, Farm Policies, pp. 362-63.

When Congress rushed through the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936, the conservation feature was considered secondary to the more important goal of continuing federal aid to farmers until a more permanent law could be prepared. The impetus of this legislation was due to the invalidation of the AAA of 1933. When the new act was passed the language tended to stress that its prime purpose was for conservation rather than price-fixing. Parts of this measure have been described earlier in this study. The soil conservation part of the program called for a classification system whereby crops were divided into the categories of soil-depleting and soil-conserving. In general it was the cash-producing crops that fell into the former category and it was those crops like grasses and legumes that were placed in the latter group which would protect and rebuild the soils.<sup>164</sup>

The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, passed on February 16, was passed as a more permanent substitute for the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act. The AAA continued the measures of the 1936 Act with but few modifications. Just as in the case with its predecessor the soil-conserving feature was secondary to the price-raising feature. Both had systems that

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<sup>164</sup>Ibid.



classified crops into the two categories of soil-depleting and soil-conserving. Under the AAA of 1938, farmers were paid for both shifting acreage from soil-depleting crops and for adopting improved conservation practices.<sup>165</sup>

The significance of these last two measures is that even though the federal government had begun to pursue soil conservation activities before the New Deal, prior to 1936 the federal government had never provided direct payments to farmers to accomplish such activities. In 1933 the federal government made direct payments to the farmers totaling some twenty-four million dollars. For subsequent years the figures are as follows: 1937--324 million dollars; 1938--309 million dollars; in 1939--it hit an all-time high of 527 million dollars; 1940--456 million dollars; and 1941--382 million dollars.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>165</sup>Benedict, Farm Policies, p. 375.

<sup>166</sup>Historical Statistics, p. 487.

## CHAPTER 5

### TEACHING CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

The fact that historians can, and do, disagree on the meaning of the same source material confuses the undergraduate in an American history survey course. Being unfamiliar with the methods and techniques of the historian, the existence of conflicting interpretations can easily cause this student to doubt the validity of the discipline of history as being a scientific or useful course of study. When told that the interpretations of historical topics often change over periods of time, that even the scholars disagree over the problems of the past, and that the views expressed in textbooks, secondary works, as well as lectures cannot be taken as absolute truths, the students often express dismay and may even come to the point of questioning why should they bother to study history.

This type of reaction by the student can be expected and even justified on the basis that he lacks the training in the methods of the historian and the way that history is written. Of course the optimum way of alleviating the student's frustration would probably be to teach him historical methodology and interpretation. This could be

done by assigning him projects in which he could become acquainted with the way a historian uses sources. However, the nature of the survey history course would make this impractical for it goes beyond the scope and objectives of this course. The lack of time prevents the instructor from going into depth on all the controversial topics and issues that may arise in the course. Perhaps an alternative could be for the instructor to provide one or two samples to illustrate to the class.

The fact that students may question the need for having to take the survey course, coupled with declining enrollments across the nation in the undergraduate sector, should make it clear that some changes may be warranted. One area that has received much recent attention as a means of enhancing the discipline and of increasing the number of students taking the course is new instructional methods.<sup>167</sup> Professors James J. Lorence and Bryan

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<sup>167</sup>Some of these studies are: Hamilton Cravens, "A Multimedia Course in Recent American History," The History Teacher 8 (November 1974): 31-43; David H. Culbert, "Family History Projects Add Meaning to an Introductory Survey," The History Teacher 7 (November 1973): 7-17; John B. Halstead, "Reading History: An Innovative Approach to the Teaching of Introductory History at Amherst College," American Historical Association Newsletter 8 (September 1970): 15-20; James C. Maroney and William J. McNeil, "Teaching College History: A Critique on Historiographical Analysis," Teaching History: A Journal of Methods 2 (Spring 1977): 1-7; Myron A. Marty, "Trends and Trendiness in Teaching Undergraduate History," Teaching History: A Journal of Methods 1 (Fall 1976): 41-47.

Hendricks have devoted some research to the study of non-traditional teaching approaches that different institutions across the nation have undertaken in hopes of helping students to understand the nature of history and the historian's craft. The conclusion drawn by these two historians is that caution should be taken when developing innovative teaching strategies. To them instructional reform does not, in and of itself, necessarily lead to increased favorable student response to history as a discipline, and that standard instruction when properly managed can and does result in the desired student response.<sup>168</sup>

However, there are those historians who are at variance with Lorence and Hendricks. James W. Hurst of Joliet Community College is somewhat critical of the traditional teaching format which consists of lectures, reading assignments, discussions, and examination--or some combination thereof. It is his position that "new materials and new methods of instruction" would better enhance the status of the discipline.<sup>169</sup> Writing in the same vein Professor Robert Hartje states, "there is a need for us, teachers of

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<sup>168</sup>James J. Lorence and Bryan Hendricks, "Is Innovative Teaching More Effective? Testing the Focus-Group Strategy in the Freshmen American Survey," The History Teacher 12 (February 1970): 196.

<sup>169</sup>James W. Hurst, "History in the Junior College Classroom," The History Teacher V (May 1972): 7.

history, to reassess our roles in the educational process." His solution for the freshman survey history class is to allow for more diversity. This means that different methods and approaches to the course might be attempted.<sup>170</sup>

In the present chapter this writer will develop some teaching strategies suggesting methods by which the history instructor might help the freshman history student to understand the nature of conflicting interpretations and how they might be made comprehensible to the inexperienced student of history. The agricultural programs of the New Deal will be used to discuss how the subject might be presented to a classroom situation. The New Deal is one of those topics that has generated considerable attention because of the varying interpretations assigned it.

In the survey history course the instructor might find that the topical approach is best when covering the New Deal. It seems to be more suitable than a straight chronological coverage because in a case study such as this, it lends itself to a closer examination of details. The comparative/contrast and the inquiry methods might well serve the same purpose.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>Robert Hartje, "Thoughts on Freshman History," The History Teacher 4 (March 1971): 40-41.

<sup>171</sup>James R. Miller and James Hunt, "Teaching History as Inquiry," The History Teacher 6 (May 1973): 9.

The New Deal seems to be ideally suited for this type of study because of several reasons. It has three distinct interpretations, and it is difficult to discredit all three simultaneously. Perhaps the main reason why it can be used in this type of study is because it moved in so many directions at the same time. How does one confront the truth that the New Deal obviously did move in new directions, in some ways quite dramatically, and still kept the old order intact (it may have even preserved it)? When historians disagree on a subject such as this it is an irritation that does not leave very easily. For the instructor to make his point even more vivid he might employ the case study method while using the agricultural programs to illustrate the problem to the class.

The mere collection and recitation of facts does not constitute the end of the historical process. If the historian ceased his work at this juncture and then began to write history or narratives of successive events without making an attempt to interpret the significance of those facts, it would largely result in a vainglorious pursuit of little importance. Albert Pollard states,

And, indeed, one's facts should be correct; but their meaning is greater than the facts themselves, and it is with the meaning of historical facts that I am now concerned. It is only

when we penetrate the outer husks of facts that we can reach the kernel of historical truth. A fact of itself is of little value unless it conveys a meaning. There is a meaning behind all facts, if one can only discover it; but to discover the meaning of facts is commonly the last object at which the writers of textbooks aim.<sup>172</sup>

Harry Elmer Barnes was vehement in his attitude on this point for he states,

It would . . . betray clouded thinking to hold that this gathering of facts marks the final completion of the task of the historian. . . . The careful and painstaking interpretation of historical material, far from being unscientific and wholly aside from the task of the historian, in reality constitutes the final rounding out of the scientific method in history and gives some meaning and significance to the vast array of assembled facts.<sup>173</sup>

All too many times historians have stressed only the facts to their classes while forsaking the meaning given to the facts, to say nothing of how the interpretations may have been derived in the first place.

Perhaps the first step that the history instructor should take before entering the classroom is to identify and outline a specific list of objectives that he wants

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<sup>172</sup>Albert Frederick Pollard, Factors in Modern History (New York: Knopf, 1928), p. 2-3.

<sup>173</sup>Harry Elmer Barnes, A History of Historical Writing (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), p. 355.

the class to accomplish during the course of study.

In his book, Preparing Instructional Objectives, Robert F. Mager states,

. . . before you prepare instruction, before you select instructional procedures or subject matter or material, it is important to be able to state clearly what you intend the results of that instruction to be.<sup>174</sup>

If the instructor can identify and communicate his objectives to his class it will provide him with better insights into selecting materials and methods. Also it will facilitate the means of assessing whether the instruction has been successful. There are several reasons why instructional objectives are important. Among them are: they contribute towards the better selection or designing of instructional content and procedures; they facilitate the means of determining the success of the instruction; they aid the student's own efforts towards accomplishing the objectives of the course as established by the instructor; and they cause the instructor to rethink what is important that should be stressed in the classroom and perhaps eliminate the less desirable or less important materials.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>Robert F. Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives (Belmont, California: Fearon Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 3.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-7.



In order for a behavior objective properly to relay its intent to the class there are three elements that the instructor should include in it. One component identifies the performance that the student is expected to accomplish. In stating the expected performance a "doing" verb should be employed to relay the intent of the objective instead of being verb. If the objective does not state the performance that is expected then it is not an objective. Another element that should be included is the important conditions under which the performance is to take place. The last part of an objective is the criterion which tells or describes how well the student must perform his task.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p. 21. The following list of sources can be used by instructors seeking ideas on writing instructional objectives: Robert M. Gagne, The Conditions of Learning (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965); Caroline Matheny Dillman and Harold F. Rahmlow, Writing Instructional Objectives (Belmont, California: Fearon Publishers, Inc., 1972); David R. Kathwohl, et al., Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook II: Affective Domain (New York: David McKay, 1964); C. M. Lindvall, ed., Defining Educational Objectives: A Report of the Regional Commission on Educational Coordination and the Learning Research and Development Center (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1964); Elizabeth Jane Simpson, The Classification of Educational Objectives: Psychomotor Domain (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1966); James W. Popham, et al., Instructional Objectives (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969); and Richard W. Burns, "Behavioral Objectives: A Selected Bibliography," Educational Technology 9 (April 1969): 57-58.

In their book, entitled Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Professor Benjamin S. Bloom and a group of other educators have provided those who instruct history classes, as well as those in other disciplines, with a very useful source for clarifying and identifying educational objectives, an effective system for describing and ordering test items, examination techniques, and tests, a classification scheme for comparing and studying educational programs, and the establishment of principles of classifying educational outcomes.

Bloom and his colleagues contend that educational objectives fit fairly neatly into three major domains or classifications--the cognitive, the affective, and the psychomotor. As defined by this group of educators,

. . . the cognitive domain emphasizes remembering or reproducing something which has presumably been learned, as well as objectives which involve the solving of some intellectual task for which the individual has to determine the essential problem and then reorder given material or combine it with ideas, methods, or procedures previously learned.<sup>177</sup>

Most educational objectives in the field of history and most other disciplines in the arts and humanities fall within this category.

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<sup>177</sup> Benjamin S. Bloom, ed., Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals (New York: David McKay, 1956), p. 5.

The second domain of the taxonomy was the affective. According to Bloom, et al., it was that area which "emphasized a feeling, a tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection". Objectives in this domain may present problems to the history instructor for they involve so much subjectivity that it is often difficult to precisely define what one is exactly trying to portray. It is in this domain that educators are most likely to encounter disagreement.<sup>178</sup>

The third domain is that of psychomotor. It is perhaps the least important area of concern for the taxonomy in a survey history class. Objectives here concern themselves with some motor or muscular skill, some manipulation of material or objects, or some performance requiring neuromuscular coordination. In the survey history course objectives concerned with this domain would probably pertain to speech or handwriting.<sup>179</sup>

There are many members in the field of education who appreciate the contribution of Bloom's taxonomy

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

and who would employ it in designing their courses. The authors encourage this for they state,

To help the reader in making use of the taxonomy, this chapter is devoted to a discussion on the problems of classifying educational objectives and test exercises. A number of illustrative objectives and test exercises are provided for the reader to classify for himself. The intent of this chapter is thus to bring the reader closer to the taxonomy and to convert it from an empty act of terms and definitions to one that the reader finds workable and applicable to his own situation.<sup>180</sup>

A modified version of the taxonomy will be applied to the New Deal in the next few pages to demonstrate how the instructor might apply the principles involved in formulating objectives to teach conflicting interpretations.

If one measures the importance of the three levels in the taxonomy on the basis of attention received in their book, the authors do not consider the major divisions in their system to be of equal importance for the cognitive domain received the majority of attention in their book. Insofar as the taxonomy pertains to history this domain should prove to be the most useful part in making out examinations, for grading, and for evaluation purposes. The cognitive domain is broken down into a heirarchical level with an ascending order of complexity.

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<sup>180</sup>Bloom, Taxonomy, p. 45.

They are labelled as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

In applying the several sub-levels of the cognitive domain to a classroom situation the instructor might logically begin by covering knowledge level objectives. It has been defined as "those behaviors and test situations which emphasize the remembering, either by recognition or recall, of ideas, material, or phenomena". In this sphere the behavior expected from the student is the storing of facts and the later recalling of the information. The authors have divided knowledge level objectives into three broad areas, with a subsequent heirarchy of sub-levels which are also arranged into ascending orders of difficulty. They are knowledge of the ways of organizing, studying, judging, and criticizing ideas and phenomena, and knowledge of major ideas, schemes, and patterns by which phenomena and ideas are organized.<sup>181</sup>

Beginning on the basic level of knowledge the instructor could ask the class to recall specific facts or pieces of information pertaining to the depression or the New Deal. This could include certain facts like

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<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

terminology or knowledge of dates, events, persons, places, etc. Two illustrative objectives that could be cited are: (1) the student will be able to list the major New Deal legislation passed by Congress to assist the farmers; (2) the student will be able to define key terms associated with the New Deal. Illustrative questions would be: (1) Identify four pieces of legislation passed during the New Deal that assisted the farmers. (2) List three problems encountered by agriculture during the New Deal.

The second level in the cognitive is comprehension which includes "those objectives, behaviors, or responses which represent an understanding of the literal message contained in a communication". There are three types of comprehension behaviors: translation which calls for information to be put into another language, into other terms, or into other forms of communication; interpretation which involves giving meaning to information through inferences, generalizations, or summaries; and extrapolation which includes making estimates or predictions based on understanding trends, tendencies, or conditions.<sup>182</sup> An illustrative objective might be: the student shall be able to comprehend and interpret the major legislation

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-90.

passed by the federal government to assist agriculture. An illustrative question for the class might be: Was the Roosevelt New Deal truly a revolution? Explain.<sup>183</sup>

The application category asks the student to be able to demonstrate that he can use or apply the new method, theory, principle, or abstraction that he learned. It is this area that causes the most problems for instructors in the cognitive domain for it requires the use of abstractions.<sup>184</sup> Since they are among the most difficult to evaluate for their success or failure, the instructor should take care in drawing up his educational objectives pertaining to the transfer of training to convey their intended meanings. An illustrative educational objective in this sphere could be: the student shall be able to apply the New Deal mentality to other historical periods. An illustrative test question might be: Would Jefferson have approved the New Deal if he had been alive and alert? Would Hamilton?<sup>185</sup> This test item might be limited to those areas pertaining only to agriculture.

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<sup>183</sup>Roger Guion Davis, Instructor's Manual to Accompany John A. Garraty, The American Nation: A History of the United States (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975), p. 210.

<sup>184</sup>Bloom, Taxonomy, p. 122.

<sup>185</sup>Thomas A. Bailey and Hugh Ross, The American Pageant Quizbook (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath Company, 1971), p. 167.

The fourth level in the cognitive domain is the analysis level. At this level the emphasis is placed on the breaking down of the material into its constituent parts, the detection of the relationships of those parts, the way they are organized, and the techniques and devices used to convey the meaning of the whole.<sup>186</sup> An illustrative educational objective that might be stated is: the student shall be able to discuss the plight of the farmers during the New Deal.

Synthesis educative objectives constitute the fifth level of the cognitive structure. In this sphere the learner is expected to recombine material and using some of his own creativity while working within the framework of that material draw new patterns or structures. His outcomes or findings should encompass more than the total sum of material that he began with. Three relatively distinct divisions of synthesis based on the product can be derived in this area. The view of the product can be a unique communication in which certain ideas or experiences are revealed; it could be projected as a plan or

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<sup>186</sup>Bloom, Taxonomy, p. 145.



proposed set of operations to be carried out by the learner; or it could result in a set of abstract resolutions.<sup>187</sup> An illustrated objective of this could be: the student shall be able to demonstrate a grasp of the New Deal as an historical reform movement. An illustrative test item could be: Formulate an interpretation of the New Deal.

The last component in the cognitive domain is that part in which qualitative or quantitative judgments about the value of some ideas, works, solutions, methods, etc., are made. This is labelled the evaluation. Some standards or other criteria of measurements for appraising the merits of the product are employed here. Out of necessity this step should be made late in the overall process for it to be valid. To some extent it involves some combination of the other behaviors discussed above--knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, and synthesis. There are two types of evaluation. One of these is made largely on the basis of internal standards of criticism with which it judges the accuracy of the product. The other type is based on external standards derived from a consideration of the ends to be served.<sup>188</sup> An illustrative objective

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

is: the student shall be able to display a fundamental grasp of the nature of historical interpretations. An illustrative test item might be: Discuss the New Deal as being a revolutionary reform movement. Evolutionary. Conservative. Which do you consider to be more correct? Why?

As previously mentioned in this chapter one problem that the instructor encounters is the lack of time to be devoted to the several controversial topics that may arise in the survey history course. In the course where the New Deal is covered the problem is getting worse because more history is being made each day but the time allotted to cover it has remained constant. There are no easy answers to resolve this dilemma. Perhaps the first idea that comes to mind is to expand one-semester courses into two and two-semester courses into three. The same general scheme might be applied to those institutions on the quarter system. However, there are several weaknesses inherent in this plan: the student would sooner or later be forced to take five years to complete the present four-year degree program; the student is already overburdened with program requirements; and the history faculty would be forced to carry class overloads.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup>Robert M. Spector, "The Time-Factor and the Teaching of College History" The Social Studies 57 (April 1966): 165.

A second possible solution would be the "topical analysis" or the "post-hole" approach wherein the instructor would cover the major topics that may arise in the course. The problem with this, however, is that unless the student had a fairly sound background in history (and there appears to be fewer reasons to believe this to be the case) he would tend to not be able to tie them together into a reasonable pattern. Although the student could be asked to fill in the gaps through his own reading this may prove to be unsatisfactory because of the same reason mentioned above; namely, he may fail to connect the several topics.<sup>190</sup>

The third solution might be to teach concepts rather than place emphasis on the memorization of facts. Under the arrangement the student would gather his own facts and the teacher provide the synthesis and analysis. The weakness here is that it would be difficult to separate the instructors' discussion from the factual material. A last solution might be to find more learned instructors in the belief that the seasoned teacher might become more able, but the efficiency would be offset with more material.<sup>191</sup> In the final analysis the best method would

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid.

probably be determined by the needs and facilities of the institution involved. Nevertheless, the instructor might resolve a good portion of his problem by singling out a particular problem, like that posed by the New Deal, and through the case study method use the inquiry or comparative/contrast approach to demonstrate to the class how answers might be acquired.<sup>192</sup>

The conclusion one writer has drawn in a recent study was "What's wrong with schools is not that teachers don't know what they're teaching, but that they don't know why they're teaching it--what the relation of their subject is to the rest of knowledge as well as to life." The implication of the statement is that instructors fail to show the ties between the past and the present.<sup>193</sup> In teaching the survey course in American history the instructor should not focus the attention of the class on only the gathering of facts with a few interpretations thrown in but on the logical and coherent interpretation

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<sup>192</sup> See Thomas J. Kerr, IV, "Developing Perception: The Use of New Interpretations in American History:", The Social Studies 57 (March 1971): 106-13; Sister Anne Meiburger, "The Technique of Comparison and Contrast in Teaching History", The Social Studies 60 (October 1969): 201-04; J. Samuel Walker, "Teaching the Method of History: A Documentary Exercise", The History Teacher (November 1977): 471-82; and Clair W. Keller, "Adding Inquiry to the 'Inquiry' Method?", The History Teacher 9 (November 1970): 47-53.

<sup>193</sup> Charles Silberman quoted in Thomas J. Kerr, IV, "The Use of New Interpretations in American History", The Social Studies 62 (March 1971): 107-108.

of the facts.<sup>194</sup> Unless the student is encouraged to develop his capacity for critical thinking, he will be hampered in his ability to detect fallacies. The introductory class should be devoted to breaking down the rigid interpretations students have and promote more than a simplistic view of the world. As it pertains to history, it will help show that historians do not form a consensus group and that differences of opinions justifiably can occur.

The merits of illustrating conflicting interpretations in the classroom are many. If the concept can be made clear to the student it will, perhaps, contribute towards developing new insights into problems and help the person in handling conflicts and temper their idealism. It will destroy many of the myths that have cropped up in our history. Also, it helps to develop in the student a sense of how historians differ in interpreting the same event and why they might differ. Hopefully this may lead the student towards becoming more critical regarding the acceptance of bare statements and into weighing information.<sup>195</sup> The end product could well be that the

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<sup>194</sup> Lee Nathaniel Newcomer, "Improving the Teaching of American History," Social Education 28 (December 1964): 472.

<sup>195</sup> Kerr, "Developing Perceptions", p. 108.

student may learn that reasonable men may differ and that history has its merits.

Once the instructor has decided how much time that he can devote to the subject, he can then introduce the class to the topic. To set the proper stage for the New Deal the background information would of necessity include several important parts. A brief description on the plight of business and farming during the twenties could provide a starting point. Here the instructor might show the consolidation and growth of big and new industries during the period. This growth can be related to the New York Stock Market, and the flaws associated with it, like people gambling on the market by buying stock on margin, might be discussed. The next point of inquiry might be the depths to which many sank during the depression and what measures were undertaken by Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt to end it. This may be part of the introduction.

At this point another element of the survey class might be brought to bear on the subject, that is, the outside or collateral reading assignment. The student should be made to understand that no historian can write a textbook that can cover all the pertinent information on the various subjects, and that it is necessary for the

student to read more than the text if he is going to broaden his perceptions on the topics. To insure that the various interpretations of the New Deal are properly understood the instructor might make certain materials mandatory reading. Arrangements can be made by the instructor for the school's bookstore to have copies available for the class. Other arrangements can be made with the librarian to make certain other works available for student usage. If necessary the instructor might make requests for certain books to be purchased by the librarian. The point that should be made in connection with the readings is the conflicting interpretations on the subject.

After the curiosity of the class had been raised to a certain level regarding the true nature of the New Deal, the instructor might then draw the class into the process of resolving the conflict. Two strategies that can be quite helpful in dramatizing the three interpretations of the New Deal are role playing and simulation.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup>Clair W. Keller, "Role Playing and Simulation in History Classes", The History Teacher 8 (November 1974): 1. Ms. Keller notes that even though the two words have been used interchangeably a major distinction exists between them. In simulation the teacher serves as a resource person who provides all the data to carry out the assignment. A strength on this scheme is that it gives the teacher greater control over the variables. In role playing the student is required to gather the necessary information. The problem with this approach is that even though the student does most of the preparation, the teacher cannot be certain that the student has gathered enough material to adequately support his position.

In employing modified versions of these two schemes the class could be divided into four equal groups with three of them being assigned the task of supporting one of the major interpretations, and the fourth group serving as a panel of judges. Under this arrangement one member of each group may be designated to portray one of the leading exponents of each school of thought. The characters being portrayed might be either a historian like Hacker, Commager, or Bernstein or a contemporary of the period like Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt.

During this period which might be called the acquisition phase, the students are to gather the necessary information. Part of its value is that it helps acquaint the student with the methods of how historians gather information and where to look. This material is to be subsequently organized by the groups into logical and coherent patterns. To dramatize the several points to be made overhead transparencies could be used. Up to this point the instructor has remained largely on the sidelines coaching and instructing the team members. He should make the assignments early enough in the school term so that the students will have enough time to complete their studies.

The other members of the group could be assigned supportive roles wherein they could help find research



material that will substantiate their group's position. In this venture the instructor could serve as a resource person from whom the students could consult regarding where information might be found. All group members need not have to research each part of the problem. For example, one member could be called upon to find background information on the historian. In this instance, sources like Contemporary Authors, Current Authors, and Who's Who in America might be consulted. This exercise will be useful for the students because it might cause them to realize that a person's personal experiences, place of residence, maturation period, birthplace, and other like factors can and do have an influence on how he might come to view an event. Another student might be asked to research and write the script for the impersonator. In so doing it might be learned that the temper of the people changes with the time.

At the prescribed time the students are to make their presentations. An effort should be made to insure that each group will be able to present their entire case on the same day if at all possible. In doing so the panel of judges will be in a better position to adjudge the argument. Each group arguing a position should have prepared a typewritten script in which their major points have been highlighted to give to the panel members. This

will facilitate the panel members being able to delineate the important points being made. Also, this exercise will be useful in that it forces the students to differentiate between important and not so important information. During the day(s) between classes the panel could be asked to meet to weigh the arguments and formulate questions that could be posed to the groups on the subsequent class meeting.

Once the students have made their presentations the instructor could then begin the synthesis process. The first area that might be covered is the basics--what did the New Deal do for agriculture, what had been done prior to this period to assist the farmers, what did the participants and contemporaries think that they were doing, etc. From here the instructor might survey the interpretations presented by the scholars. In this exercise the student will be made aware of the kinds of information that historians draw on for evidence. In light of the information the students will begin to draw inferences of their own about the subject. Also, the student may come to realize that historians cannot possibly know all the facts regarding their subject. Too, they will come to know that all statements and conclusions are not necessarily based on facts.

Clair W. Keller, an advocate of this activity, believes that this method is most effective when the teaching strategies seek to reach a conclusion between conflicting viewpoints.<sup>197</sup> However, she warns of the pitfalls of this method. Some students see it as "playing games" and fail to take it seriously enough. Another is that because it entails the student having to do so much work, they often perceive of themselves as doing the teacher's job.<sup>198</sup>

In an exercise like that described above the student will learn many valuable lessons that may well serve him for the rest of his life. First, he will hopefully have become introduced and made generally familiar with historical methodology. This may provide him with a better appreciation of how history is written. Secondly, this type of activity can be applied to areas other than history since it is not the only discipline wherein the scholars disagree. Lastly, it should cause the student's vision to be broadened and help him to understand that truth, like life itself, has many sides.

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<sup>197</sup>Clair W. Keller, Involving Students in the New Social Studies (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1974), pp. 41-55.

<sup>198</sup>Clair W. Keller, "Role Playing and Simulation in History Classes", p. 1.

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