

# 2

## **HIGH TIDE: ROOSEVELT, TRUMAN, AND THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY, 1932–1952**

*Alonzo L. Hamby*

The modern Democratic Party, observers agree with near unanimity, emerged from the trauma of the Great Depression. For a twenty-year moment in history, beginning with Franklin Roosevelt's landslide victory over Herbert Hoover in 1932, it dominated American politics and served as a vehicle for an enormous social transformation that was abetted by an unprecedented growth in the functions and institutional structure of the national government. What with the Depression, World War II, the onset of the Cold War, and the social restructuring that accompanied these phenomena, it seems natural enough to call these two decades a watershed in American history.<sup>1</sup>

The Democratic high tide, however, might equally be considered a peak in which a long-established political party, with a polyglot constituency and an amorphous policy direction, displayed unexpected resources to lead the American nation through one of the most critical periods of its history. The special character of this era in Democratic history is illustrated by a telling statistic: in 1932, Roosevelt was the party's first candidate for president since Franklin Pierce (in 1852) to win more than 50 percent of the total popular vote. FDR would do it four times. Only two Democrats have managed it since—Lyndon Johnson in 1964 by an enormous margin and Jimmy Carter in 1976 by a scant half a percent. To an enormous degree, the Democratic success of the 1930s and 1940s was less a matter of national identity and organizational strength than the personal charisma and strong leadership of one president—who in the end valued policy achievement over party.

Begun in the 1790s as an alliance between southern agrarians and northern city politicians, the Democratic Party could locate both its greatest strength and greatest weakness in the diversity of its adherents. Its truly national base made it usually a force to be reckoned with in Congress but also caused it to appear frequently unfocused in presidential elections. Its diversity also contributed to a disjunction between presidential and congressional parties far more pronounced than among the more homogeneous Republicans. From Jefferson and Jackson on, the Democrats claimed one unifying theme—an identity as the party of “the people,” representing the majority in a society permeated by democratic values. The electoral appeal of that claim could at times be overwhelming. More often, however, this identity was lost in discord among the party’s disparate economic and ethnoreligious groups. Increasingly in the nineteenth century, the Democrats had difficulty mobilizing their purported majority in presidential contests precisely because of deep divisions. (When the party split in 1860, so, catastrophically, did the nation.) Without a charismatic president with a strong sense of direction (Jefferson, Jackson, Wilson), the party was less than the sum of its parts, lacking policy coherence and more devoted to forming firing squads in a circle than to attacking the presumed common enemy.

Franklin Roosevelt and the new liberalism to which he attached himself would initiate a moment of Democratic ascendancy in American politics until the generational change and new social-cultural values of the 1960s reshuffled American politics. The building of a new majority from diverse elements was briefly characterized by a group of unprecedented public policy innovations that we call the New Deal (a label that gives a misleading impression of unified coherence), a “transforming” or “realigning” election in 1936 that seemed to create an unbeatable coalition, then a reaction in which disunifying tendencies reasserted themselves. After Roosevelt, the Democrats would continue as the majority party in American politics, but more in congressional than presidential elections and at the cost of an internal gridlock that contained within itself elements of self-destruction.

### **THE DEMOCRATIC SPLIT PERSONALITY**

In some respects, the Democratic Party of 1932 reflected the split personality that had resulted from the alliance between Jefferson and Burr 140 years earlier. Its most visible segment consisted of the predominantly rural-small town, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant South and West; it was here that,

first, William Jennings Bryan, then, Woodrow Wilson had drawn the bulk of their electoral votes in their runs for the presidency. Its most dynamic and fastest-growing segment, however, was among the ethnoreligious, working-class minorities of the northeastern quadrant of the country. As yet, they had delivered few electoral votes to Democratic presidential candidates, but Wilson's paper-thin 1916 success in Ohio and Al Smith's 1928 victories in Massachusetts and Rhode Island were harbingers of the future.

The prevailing outlook of the southern-western wing was "Jeffersonian," a term of almost infinite malleability<sup>2</sup> variously interpreted in one or more of the following senses: (1) small, frugal government and states rights (often tied in with white supremacy), (2) an agrarian fundamentalism that stressed the importance of the small, family farmer as an anchor of social stability, (3) a more broadly based faith in the small enterpriser as the linchpin of society, (4) an often bitter hostility toward the large corporations and enormous financial power centered in the Northeast, (5) a related belief in free trade and resentment of the protective tariff as special-interest legislation, and (6) a generalized devotion to democracy and the essential virtue of "the common people," often defined as the "producing classes."

In this multiplicity of meanings, one could find a rationale for a conservatism that stood for as few public services as possible and rejected any interference in such quaint local customs as slavery, lynching or child labor; one equally could find a basis for certain types of government activism, especially antitrustism, the regulation of big business and finance, or help for the farmer. In one way or another, however, Jeffersonians looked backward, hoping to recreate a fondly remembered, mythic past in which America was less urbanized, less spoiled, less complicated, and less centralized. Many of them envisioned that world as characterized by a high degree of ethnic and cultural homogeneity in which their own norms were dominant. In the 1920s, facing the challenge of the urban-immigrant world, they resorted to such instruments of social control as prohibition and immigration restriction. Not a few looked to the revived Ku Klux Klan as a tribune of Americanism. With cultural issues at the forefront of American politics, they found themselves more in conflict with the urban wing of their own party than with the Republicans.

The outlook of the northeastern urban Democrats was far less well defined but clearly different in style and content. Based primarily upon the experience of belonging to a working class that was economically and culturally marginalized, frequently reflecting a day-to-day existence at or near the bottom rung in hierarchical systems of industrial authority, it pos-

sessed a quasi-Marxian (not communist, not even socialist) sense of the distribution of power and privilege in American society. Motivated by feelings of class differences far more intense than those ordinarily found among the southern-western Jeffersonians, the northeastern Democrats tended vaguely toward social democracy, or, as some then and since have called it, “bread and butter liberalism.” They had far fewer qualms than many of the Jeffersonians about an activist state. Their politics was less about opportunity and support for the small enterpriser than about regulation of working conditions, wages, and hours; social welfare; and encouragement of labor unionism. If the Jeffersonians, in one fashion or another, put the free individual at the center of their philosophy, the northeasterners thought more in terms of the collective. The policy conceptualizers among them might have at least a foot in various ideological camps just to the left of the party structure, primarily in the democratic socialism of Norman Thomas, David Dubinsky, and Sidney Hillman. Stopping short of nationalization of industry, they tended to favor extensive government regulation and economic planning.

Throughout the 1920s, cultural conflicts fatally divided the party. The southern-western Democrats saw themselves as attempting to protect a traditional America against an alien attack; the northeastern Democrats perceived themselves as being under assault from bigots trying to force their ways upon people who wanted the freedom to continue their cultural traditions (whether the consumption of alcoholic beverages or the education of one’s child in a parochial school) and the right to get a job without discrimination. By 1928, many southern-western Democrats envisioned Herbert Hoover as less offensive than their own party’s candidate, Al Smith. In the Northeast, on the other hand, the scorn of traditional America drove Catholics and Jews, Irish and Italians, and numerous other ethnic and religious groups that previously had displayed little use for each other together behind Smith.

In truth, both sides to the Democratic conflict practiced what David Burner has called a “politics of provincialism”<sup>3</sup> during the 1920s, their conflicting cultures reflecting a near-even demographic balance between city and country. This situation illustrated a general tendency in the history of American politics—during periods of prosperity, ethnocultural and “social” issues loom large in the political dialogue; during periods of economic distress, they tend to be displaced by distributive questions. It took the Great Depression to refocus the Democratic Party and bring unity to it.

## THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE NEW DEAL

It is all but impossible for the contemporary generation to grasp the seriousness of the economic trauma the Great Depression inflicted on the entire world. An international phenomenon with origins in World War I and its aftermath, the Depression demanded an international solution. Instead, it fostered feelings of go-it-alone nationalism in virtually every developed country and set in motion forces that culminated in World War II. Beginning in the United States as a relatively moderate recession after the stock market crash of 1929, it accelerated downward after mid-1930, partly as a result of the Hawley-Smoot tariff (the most protectionist U.S. trade legislation of the twentieth century) and egregiously mistimed credit tightening by the Federal Reserve, partly as a result of numerous errors and catastrophes in other countries.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of 1932, the U.S. gross national product and per capita personal income had fallen to approximately 56 percent of the 1929 total. Unemployment, estimated at an average 3.2 percent in 1929, was at 23.6 percent. Farm income was approximately one-third the 1929 level. In the three years 1930–32, some five thousand banks failed with estimated losses to depositors of about \$800 million dollars (at least \$8 billion in today's terms).<sup>5</sup> During the winter of 1932–33, thanks to the strong downward momentum already established and to widespread uncertainty about the direction of a new administration in Washington, things actually got worse. It would take volumes to describe the suffering summarized by such statistics.

However one wishes to apportion the blame, it is clear that the dominant Republicans, from President Herbert Hoover down, dealt with the economic crisis in a way that neither arrested its precipitous slide nor raised public morale. Hoover had begun as a vigorous activist, confident that presidential leadership could manage the economy into recovery, but despite some promising first steps he had been overwhelmed. His line-in-the-sand opposition to federal funding of individual relief payments or works projects had given him an unjustified appearance of indifference to the suffering of the unemployed. Shantytowns populated by the homeless began to spring up in one city after another, called, in time, "Hoovervilles." In 1932 the electorate swept Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats into office in a landslide that was primarily a negative vote against Hoover and the Republicans.<sup>6</sup>

Roosevelt's inauguration on March 4, 1933, endures among the most compelling moments in American history. Tens of millions listened by radio; other millions saw highlights in the movie newsreels that were just beginning

to achieve a level of maturity. The voice and the film images conveyed a firm confidence and radiated the authority of a man born to the leadership class. The speech was electrifying: "This is a day of national consecration. . . . This great nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. . . . The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." It promised "action, and action now." Democracy would prevail. The people had "asked for discipline and direction under leadership." The new president continued: "They have made me the present instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift, I take it." The specifics of Roosevelt's agenda were at best fuzzy, but no one could doubt that he would be a strong leader who stood for change.<sup>7</sup>

FDR had put forth no clear, coherent program during the campaign. In part conscious strategy, this policy fuzziness also reflected the unprecedented character of the emergency and the divided mind of his party. Clearly, however, the new president had trumped Hoover by stating not simply a commitment to policies of economic recovery, but also to relief and reform. Whether from Jeffersonian or northeastern urban perspectives, the Democrats had been, on the whole, a party of reform in American life since Bryan and *the* party of reform since Theodore Roosevelt's failed Bull Moose campaign. Precisely what kind of reform, however, remained a question. For Bryan, then Wilson, reform had meant government aid to farmers and small enterprisers, low tariffs, regulation of big business, some social legislation, and tentative ties to organized labor. Wilson's 1916 campaign had been waged on policies that established a basis for the grand coalition of interest groups that would be solidified by Franklin Roosevelt. Still, no observer in 1932 would have identified the party unequivocally with northeastern, working-class social democracy.<sup>8</sup>

Never firmly aligned with the northeastern wing of the party, Roosevelt had many personal and emotional ties to the Wilson administration, which had been heavily southern-western in tone while reaching out to the northeastern Democrats. Throughout the 1920s, while struggling with polio, he had kept a foot in both camps. Although he was in his fourth year as governor of New York in 1932, the northeasterners predominantly supported Al Smith. FDR owed his nomination largely to the southern and western Jeffersonians, whom he repaid by naming as his vice president John Nance Garner of Texas. His major advisers included northeastern social welfarists and economic planners, Ivy League lawyers and economists, a few regional businessmen, and a couple of turncoat Republicans. His congressional leadership was primarily from the South and West. His policies over the next six years reflected that diversity.<sup>9</sup>

The New Deal began as a relatively coherent economic recovery program based on “corporatist” planning. A loose concept of state management in the interest of all classes and occupational groups, corporatism was in vogue in Europe, where it had roots stretching back into feudal conceptions of society and could make use of already strong state bureaucracies. Its American antecedents lay in the New Nationalism of Herbert Croly and Theodore Roosevelt; in the institutional economics of FDR’s “brains-trusters” Rexford Tugwell, Adolf A. Berle Jr., and Raymond Moley; and above all in the experience of World War I mobilization. Its closest working model was the political economy of Italy. Needless to say, Roosevelt did not envision himself as a Mussolini-style dictator. He and his advisors did hope that the guiding hand of government could coordinate business, labor, and agriculture in a way that would deliver benefits to all concerned and bring the nation out of the depression.

On paper, the blueprint seemed promising. A National Recovery Administration (NRA) would provide a mechanism by which industry could stabilize prices and production while labor received fair wages, hours, and working conditions. A separate Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) would curtail the surplus of farm commodities and thereby put upward pressure on prices. In the meantime, limited relief payments and public works expenditures would combine with devaluation of the dollar and a large increase in the money supply to jump-start the economy.<sup>10</sup>

Alas, the history of the 1930s would demonstrate that a managed economy functioned much better under a totalitarian regime, whether Fascist, Nazi, or Communist, than under a democratic one. It was to the credit of the New Deal that compliance to NRA codes by businesses was in the beginning voluntary (although subject to the pressure of public opinion) and that labor unions retained the right to organize and to strike. These democratic safeguards, however, made implementation a slow and uneven process; the Ford Motor Company, for example, never signed on. The NRA soon made itself an unhappy example of imperial overstretch by trying to regulate everything from mom-and-pop grocery stores to the New York “burlesque industry.”<sup>11</sup> The green light for labor unionism, the wage and hour provisions, and the cumbersome bureaucratic character of most NRA codes engendered wide resentment among smaller businessmen. Labor unions soon discovered that the codes could not guarantee them organizing victories; a major drive built around the slogan, “President Roosevelt wants you to join the union,” failed badly during the NRA’s first year, a victim of management resistance, union ineptness, and worker indifference. In the end, the NRA was far more suc-

cessful at raising prices than increasing wages or giving the average consumer more purchasing power.

Public-works spending, moreover, got underway far too haltingly because of caution on the part of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes and because most states lacked the matching funds they were required to contribute. It was for this reason that, much to the disgust of many progressives, a large chunk of PWA money went into a major naval building program that produced the aircraft carriers *Enterprise* and *Yorktown*, four cruisers, and numerous other warships.

Only agriculture experienced a significant measure of recovery. Although controversial in its initial use of crop destruction, the AAA (primarily employing acreage allotments) pulled up prices for its desperate clients. Supplemental loan programs provided relief from mortgage foreclosures. Farmers, who liked to think of themselves as independent, individualistic enterprisers, protested not a whit. In fact, no other group had so long a history of seeking (and receiving) government support. Before 1933 most of what was called "progressivism" had consisted of agrarian initiatives; the New Deal agricultural programs represented a fulfillment. Ruled unconstitutional in January 1936, the AAA was quickly resurrected in the guise of a soil conservation program; in 1938, after the Supreme Court had been tamed, it was reinstated openly.

On the other hand, when the Supreme Court declared the NRA unconstitutional on May 27, 1935, the agency had become unpopular and was generally judged a failure. Special ad hoc legislation continued corporatist-style planning in a few industries, most notably coal, at the behest of both labor and management. Several enactments, moreover, brought comprehensive federal regulation to trucking, the airlines, and inland waterways in much the same fashion that it already existed in railroads, thereby establishing a de facto corporate state for transportation.

A great outburst of legislation in mid-1935 brought the country the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act), important banking regulation, and the path-breaking Social Security system. In general, however, after the demise of the NRA, the New Deal possessed no consciously administered recovery plan worthy of the name. Instead, driven by political opportunism, intellectual exhaustion, and sheer frustration, its economic policies featured big-business bashing, attacks on the rich, and an intermittent, inconsequential, antitrustism.

All the same, in 1936, prosperity seemed to be roaring back; industrial production moved up sharply, and unemployment threatened to fall into



single digits. In retrospect, this apparently strong recovery seems to have been in large measure the result of two developments: a greatly expanded relief program centered on the new Works Progress Administration (WPA), and congressional passage over FDR's veto of immediate payment of the World War I veterans bonus. Together, these measures, which many congressmen saw as reelection devices, injected enormous stimulus into the economy. The WPA reached into every county in the United States; its roads, buildings, and parks were useful additions to the national infrastructure. More often than not, its local operations were controlled by Democratic officials who employed it as a patronage device. It contributed enormously to Roosevelt's reelection.

In early 1937 the president, persuaded that the nation could no longer afford huge budget deficits, decided to cut back. He ordered draconian relief reductions for the fiscal year that began July 1. By then also, the one-time-only shot of the bonus payment had made its impact. Federal Reserve policy, as was the case throughout the thirties, did some inadvertent damage; fearing inflation, although unemployment was still at double-digit rates, the Fed pushed up interest rates. (Roosevelt's Federal Reserve chairman, Marriner Eccles, is usually remembered as a strong advocate of deficit spending; he was also a sound Mormon banker who spent much of his career fixated on the adverse consequences of loose monetary policies.)

The result was a recession that might fairly be styled a mini-depression. In a matter of months, unemployment rocketed toward 20 percent; as late as 1939, it averaged 17 percent.<sup>12</sup> Looking back, it appears that the Roosevelt administration almost inadvertently had set a recovery *process* in motion with no real *plan* for managing it. What could have been the crowning success of the New Deal became instead its most conspicuous failure.

### **THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY: WAS THERE AN UNTAKEN PATH?**

In February 1938, as the "Roosevelt recession" was plumbing its depths, the president received a lengthy letter from the renowned English economist John Maynard Keynes. Stripped to its essentials, the communication had two central lines of advice: back off from unproductive fights with the business community and resume a program of strong government spending, especially in such socially desirable areas as working-class housing.<sup>13</sup> Roosevelt answered with a friendly, noncommittal reply. Two months later, after an in-

tense debate among his advisers, FDR initiated a period of higher relief expenditures; the move halted the downward economic spiral. But the renewed spending was too little and too late to bring the country back to where it had been in 1936, much less to full recovery; and neither the administration nor Congress was prepared to go much farther.

A generation of scholars that had accepted Keynesian economics as a new orthodoxy came rather too easily and naturally to the conclusion that Roosevelt had needlessly prolonged the Depression because he did not understand the emerging Keynesian formula for restoring prosperity. Intimidated by Republican criticism of his “enormous” deficits, he failed to inject enough fiscal stimulus into the economy to bring it back.<sup>14</sup> The argument is attractive when one considers that the economy waxed and waned during the 1930s in relatively direct proportion to the amount of federal spending. It is probable that the largely unconscious Keynesian policies of 1935–36 amounted to the right path. If WPA spending had tapered off more slowly over a period of a few years, the country might have pursued an orderly course to prosperity. As it was, the administration’s go-stop fiscal policy created a second, and more difficult, pit to climb out of. By the beginning of 1938, Germany had left the Depression behind for two years—even before Hitler’s massive military program had reached full development. Britain in many respects also had handled the Depression better than the United States. Despite enormous problems managing industrial decline at home and global interests abroad, its predominantly Conservative government managed to avoid the depths reached in Germany and the United States. It won enormous electoral victories in 1931 and 1935. As Roosevelt struggled with the economic collapse of 1937–38, the British were beginning rearmament in earnest and putting the Depression behind them. America, by contrast, remained mired in its economic meltdown until the unrestrained spending of World War II finally ended unemployment and laid the basis for postwar prosperity.<sup>15</sup>

Before then, however, massive federal spending on a scale beyond that of 1936, whether for dams and regional development authorities or for aircraft carriers and tanks, was never a live option. Keynes himself had published his major work, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, only in 1936. At best an influential policy gadfly in his own country, he had no wide following among either academics or policy intellectuals for fiscal prescriptions that struck most economists as the rankest heresy. Roosevelt’s moves to pump up relief spending in 1938 were a product of political calculation and social compassion, not economic strategy, and were limited by political realities. He had run enormous deficits all along when measured against any pre-

vious standard. In the first fiscal year (FY) of the New Deal (as well as the last two of the Hoover administration!), the budget deficit exceeded 50 percent of expenditures. Until FY 1938 deficits remained extraordinarily high, running from 33 to 46 percent of total outlays. The resumption of spending in FY 1939 brought the percentage back to 43 percent.<sup>16</sup>

Federal spending as a portion of the gross national product was, it is true, much smaller then than now, but in the climate of the Depression decade it seemed awesome. The pressure to cut back spending in 1937 was broadly based and widely felt. The political system likely would not have accommodated even greater “excess,” especially after the Republicans made a strong comeback in the 1938 elections. And even if hyperdeficits had been possible, it is far from clear that in peacetime they would have had the same effect as when incurred under the necessity of war. It is fair to say that the Keynesian alternative was never fully tried—so long as one also notes that it, for all practical purposes, did not exist.

Neither did another route that would seem imperative not many years later—the expansion of world trade. The world of the 1930s had become irretrievably autarkic; New Deal planners and Keynesians alike assumed realistically that a recovery had to be driven by internal consumption. Thus, Roosevelt abandoned a traditional Democratic doctrine. The Hawley-Smoot tariff stayed on the books, altered a bit by numerous bilateral trading deals negotiated under the reciprocal trade program. In truth, however, reciprocal trade was as much a smokescreen to conceal the basic pattern of protectionism that persisted through the 1930s as an effort to return piecemeal to the openness of the Underwood tariff. The best that could be said in defense of such a policy was that Hawley-Smoot had let the genie out of the bottle and that it was too late to reverse the trend of protectionism that gripped every major economic power. Post–World War II Democrats, believing they had learned from the past and able to impress their vision upon a prostrate world, would see interwar protectionism as a leading cause of World War II and promote an open international political economy.

With the possibilities for spending mishandled and imperfectly understood, with the expansion of international trade impossible, with a totalitarian alternative unthinkable, no clear road to prosperity existed after 1936. Political power, however, had given the Democrats opportunities to pursue long-held reform impulses. The 1930s thus became an age of reforms that, as often as not, got in the way of recovery.

In no area does this conclusion seem more obvious than tax policy.<sup>17</sup> The Social Security payroll tax is usually cited as the primary example. It may, as

Roosevelt contended, have been a necessary method of institutionalizing the program. From the beginning it also had the peripheral function of providing a lot of forced savings to fund the public debt, thereby sucking money out of the private economy and discouraging a consumption-driven recovery. The processing tax that funded the original agricultural program effectively raised the prices of many ordinary consumer products and was likewise regressive.

The Wealth Tax Act of 1935 became emblematic of a New Deal commitment to income redistribution and “class warfare.” It raised marginal tax brackets on incomes of more than \$100,000 and increased taxes on gifts, inheritances, and the like, but in truth it was more symbol than substance. Proposed primarily to counter the “share the wealth” appeal of Huey Long, it was both a political ploy and an automatic expression of a traditional progressivism that equated soaking the rich with reform. By one estimate it raised taxes only for America’s richest man, John D. Rockefeller. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of class conflict that swirled around it surely decreased the confidence of the investing classes. Perhaps the worst considered of the New Deal taxes was the Undistributed Profits Tax of 1936, a 7–27 percent surtax on retained corporate profits, apparently passed in the belief that business was stashing cash hordes under mattresses and thereby retarding recovery. An extraordinarily effective way of discouraging capital formation, it elicited intense, and mostly justifiable, protests from business. It was repealed in 1938 with Roosevelt’s grudging assent.

The primary motive behind New Deal tax policy was an increasingly perceived need for revenues to fund new relief and social welfare programs. Here it ran up against the problem that all modern welfare states face: How much can be extracted from the haves in order to assist the have-nots, and by what methods, without damaging the engines of productivity that ultimately sustain any safety-net system? The issue is one of pragmatic judgment rather than fundamental morality, of finding ways to define and balance social responsibility with economic reality.

There was a strong secondary impulse, however. Partly cold political calculation but at least equally visceral emotion, it consisted of a desire to punish the rich and the business classes. And why not? “Business” (a term generally used to denote the large corporate interests and, by extension, the wealthy) had claimed credit for the prosperity of the 1920s, had been unable to cope with the Depression, and now bitterly criticized the New Deal as an assault on the American Way of Life. “Business” by the mid-1930s had become America’s favorite scapegoat, whether in Hollywood films or in Washington.

By then, corporate leaders who could not bear to hear Roosevelt's name called him "That Man," accused him of communistic tendencies, and semi-privately relished rumors that he was syphilitic. In the campaign of 1936, Roosevelt responded by attacking "economic royalists," "the forces of organized selfishness and of lust for power," and advocates of "a new industrial dictatorship."<sup>18</sup> From the standpoint of political tactics, such rhetoric made a lot of sense. Roosevelt and his core constituencies, moreover, found it emotionally satisfying. Nonetheless, attacks on business did little to get the economy moving. Just as Roosevelt never understood Keynesian economics, neither did he follow another bit of advice he received from Keynes—to cultivate business leaders, treat their crankiness as that of household animals who had been badly trained, respond to it with kind words, ask for their advice, and elicit their support.<sup>19</sup> It was wise counsel, but by the time Roosevelt received it in early 1938 too many bridges had been burned.

Roosevelt and many of the New Deal policy makers had feelings about commerce that ran from simple disinterest to positive revulsion. The president himself, the product of an old-money family, derived his income from inherited wealth and had been brought up in the tradition of a socially responsible gentry. The New Deal brain-trusters and administrators were heavily drawn from an emerging policy intelligentsia of academics and social activists who had to one degree or another consciously rejected business as a livelihood. Many of the southern and western "Jeffersonians" in the Democratic Party were neopopulists who thrived on the traditional Jeffersonian-Jacksonian hostility toward big finance. The rapidly growing forces of organized labor were in some places led at the local level by Communists and almost universally prone to a militancy and sense of class conflict that appeared as natural in the hard times of Depression America as it seems alien to a more prosperous society.

New Deal policies of maximum support to organized labor may have brought a healthy balance to the economy by contributing to the establishment of a society in which an affluent working class could indulge in mass consumption. In the short run, they got in the way of recovery. Strikes and labor militancy in 1937–38 disrupted the economy. Union wage settlements (undergirded to a small extent by the Fair Labor Standards Act) gave employed workers a better income than they otherwise might have enjoyed but also gave employers a greater incentive to minimize employment.<sup>20</sup>

Neither Roosevelt nor those around him nor the Jeffersonians nor many of the labor leaders wanted to do away with capitalism; rather, they talked about humanizing it and finding a middle way. Still, one is forced to con-

clude, neither did they understand how it worked. There was a certain justice to the oft-repeated complaint that they were theorists who had never met a payroll. Alienated from commerce, they never found much common ground with the leaders of American business. They often proclaimed their sympathy for small business, saw it as a constructive force, and wanted to champion it. Few among them, however, understood that small businessmen as a group shared the worldview of big business leaders. Indeed they clung to it more tenaciously because they were usually entrepreneurs who had an investment of personal ego in their operations exceeding that of most corporate managers.<sup>21</sup>

Small enterprisers undoubtedly found the burdens of government regulation and the need to negotiate with labor unions harder to deal with than did large corporations. Nor did New Deal tax policy give them any relief. The Wealth Tax Act of 1935, according to William E. Leuchtenburg, “destroyed most of the Brandeisian distinction between big and small business,”<sup>22</sup> whatever the intentions of the administration. The Social Security payroll tax provided a new federal requirement at a time when federal taxes were not generally withheld from paychecks.

In the tumultuous 1930s, some degree of hostility and misunderstanding between the Roosevelt administration and the business community was probably inevitable. The outlook of both sides was characterized by prejudices and blind spots that made it practically impossible to find common ground. Still, one may wish the effort had been made—and must observe that it was, during World War II, with considerable benefit to the nation and to all the concerned social groups. In the absence of an obvious formula for restoring prosperity and promoting economic growth, the Roosevelt administration and many Democrats in Congress turned to class conflict and redistributionism, rhetorical antitrustism, generous relief programs, and a rudimentary social welfare state. Not productive as an economic program, this agenda emerged because it was a logical outgrowth of the Democratic Party’s history.

In his 1938 letter to Roosevelt, Keynes had written, “I am terrified lest progressive causes in all the democratic countries should suffer injury, because you have taken too lightly the risk to their prestige which would result from a failure measured in terms of immediate prosperity.”<sup>23</sup> The remark implicitly recognized the leadership that both the United States and Roosevelt himself *had* to provide for what remained of the liberal-democratic world. One can assess with a fair degree of precision the consequences of the economic failure of 1937 for the United States in terms of increased unemployment

and unproduced GNP. It is not possible to gauge the impact on the wider world. One can imagine a United States as prosperous as Nazi Germany, able to look outward and present democracy rather than totalitarianism as the wave of the future. Just possibly, such a nation might have been able to provide leadership for demoralized European democracies at a time when the Nazi experiment might have been brought to a sudden halt. Instead, the New Deal was at best an ambiguous example to the rest of the world.

### **BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY: THE ROOSEVELT COALITION**

If, then, the Democrats failed to solve the economic crisis they had been elected to meet, how did they emerge from the 1930s as a majority party?

A small part of the answer is that they were lucky in the opposition. The Republicans, shell-shocked by the Depression, produced no ideas, no vision, and no leadership. The emergence of Robert A. Taft as “Mr. Republican” and Thomas E. Dewey as Most Electable Candidate by the 1940s suggests a party not only in bankruptcy but also in a desperate search for a suitable receiver.

The parties of the left (Wisconsin Progressives, Minnesota Farmer-Laborites, La Guardia Fusionists, Socialists) never presented a significant challenge. They failed to develop a domestic program with mainstream appeal, were hopelessly split on foreign policy, and eventually were unable to resist the overwhelming gravitational pull of the Democrats.

Still, the shortcomings of the opposition provide only the beginning of an explanation. Politicians and parties become winners not just because they have some good breaks but because they know how to take advantage of them. Roosevelt and the Democrats did so superbly.

Roosevelt himself was the party’s greatest asset. Political scientists may quibble about whether he was the founder of “the modern presidency,” but he surely unlocked its potential. Above all, he demonstrated that a party of diversity requires strong, charismatic leadership to rise above its natural tendency to engage in interest-group squabbling. Evoking first the fight against the Depression, and then the struggle against fascism, he gave the Democratic Party and New Deal liberalism a vision of the national interest that legitimized it for a generation.

Influenced by the examples of his cousin Theodore and his old chief, Woodrow Wilson, FDR was a consummate master of the news media. He opened up the White House press conference, playing it like a virtuoso to get

his message across while maintaining a rapport with most of the journalists who covered him regularly. He appeared in newsreels radiating confidence and fortitude. Above all, he emerged as a technical master of the newest and most direct medium of communication—radio.

Possessing an authoritative Harvard-accented voice that appealed to the sensibility of the age, gifted with a remarkable talent for rhetorical pacing, able to project a sense of empathy with ordinary people out beyond the microphone, he was his nation's first great communicator of the electronic media age.<sup>24</sup> Words, Roosevelt understood, were no substitute for policy, but they could serve as a powerful adjunct to it, bringing the political support of people who were convinced that he cared about them in a direct, personal way and who felt connected to a grander, larger vision. Accepting the Democratic nomination in 1936, he declared, "This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny." More than a nice rhetorical flourish, the sentence was a declaration of national mission that made a lasting impact on millions of people.

Roosevelt's style and talent facilitated the policies that recreated the Democratic Party as a majority coalition. If ultimately he and the Democrats failed at achieving economic recovery, they would appear throughout his first term to be marching toward it with double-digit gains in GNP and a steady reduction in the unemployment rate. (Richard Vedder and Lowell Gallaway estimate that unemployment in March 1933, when Roosevelt took office, peaked at 28.3 percent and that in November 1936, when he was elected for a second term, it was down to 13.9 percent.<sup>25</sup>) Voters, moreover, benefited from numerous varieties of direct and immediate assistance.

The New Deal programs aimed at helping individuals in distress were so numerous as to defy a complete listing—home and farm mortgage refinancing, work relief, direct relief (also known as the dole and constituting a far greater proportion of the total relief effort than is usually recognized), regional development, rural resettlement, farm price supports, wage and hour legislation, and the Social Security system. At one level, as many Republicans charged, this amounted to buying votes by playing Santa Claus. At another, however, it was an effort by an activist government to meet genuine human needs. Unsurprisingly, the political and the humanitarian motives might get mixed up with each other.

The most far-reaching of the work programs, the WPA, for example, provided hundreds of thousands of jobs for desperate people and left behind tens of thousands of little monuments in the form of useful public works in almost every county in the United States. It also was, pure and simple, a source of patronage for many state and local political bosses. And, in the



manner of today's welfare programs, it fostered a sense of dependency among its long-term clients, especially those who lived in low-wage rural areas with little manufacturing or construction.<sup>26</sup>

Yet while Republican criticism resonated with what was left of the comfortable middle class, it was less than devastating because the purposes of New Deal largesse were fundamentally conservative—to preserve a class of farm and home owners, to provide work for those who needed it, and to give hand-outs only to unemployables. Those who received benefits from the New Deal were generally intensely grateful, frequently reacting almost as if they were a personal gift from FDR himself. For millions of Americans the New Deal boiled down to two elements: Roosevelt and relief. All the rest was irrelevant.

Roosevelt's landslide victory of 1936 was a transforming event in American history, but a somewhat deceptive one. What we might call the "core Roosevelt coalition" lies within the 60 percent of the vote that FDR polled; it would be a dominant force in Democratic presidential politics but no more than a powerful minority in the larger electoral panorama. In taking forty-six of forty-eight states, Roosevelt carried virtually every significant group in America other than (for lack of a better term) "the business classes." He also carried in on his coat-tails the largest Democratic delegations ever in the House of Representatives (331) and the Senate (76). But much of this majority was produced by a surging economy and a weak, uninspiring Republican opponent. Like Ronald Reagan half a century later, the president could ask people if they were better off than four years earlier and get a happy response. The longer-term question as the economic upturn stalled in 1937 was just who would stay with him. A rough sorting-out of several overlapping categories follows:

*OLD-STOCK, WHITE, ANGLO-SAXON PROTESTANTS.* Roosevelt carried only a bare majority of this predominantly middle-class, traditionally Republican group. In the future it would go against him and other Democratic candidates.

*URBAN ETHNORELIGIOUS MINORITIES.* Roosevelt won the normally Democratic Catholic and Jewish votes by large majorities. He had actively sought both. Catholics, personified by Democratic National Chairman Jim Farley, Securities Exchange Commission Chairman Joe Kennedy, or young White House aide Tommy Corcoran, were a highly visible part of his administration. Catholic constituencies at the local level included many national backgrounds—Italian, Polish, German, Portuguese, Eastern European, French-Canadian. These groups might have little use for each other in the cauldron of melting-pot politics, but as they became more assimilated they

also became more class-conscious.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, they responded to a degree of attention they never had received from any previous president.

Jews who looked for representation in Washington would find, among others, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau and Corcoran's good friend and White House colleague Benjamin V. Cohen. On the whole they were more likely than Catholics to be drawn to FDR by a liberal ideology. Despite some reluctance by New Deal administrators to take on too many Jews in visible positions, they were far more numerous, and more noticed, in the Roosevelt presidency than in any that had preceded it.<sup>28</sup> Mutterings from the far right that the New Deal was a Jew Deal were grossly exaggerated but were also motivated by an unprecedented Jewish presence at the highest levels of government.

In the future, both groups would remain important parts of the coalition. Catholic representation, however, would be eroded by upward economic mobility and by concerns that the party was too soft on communism. Jewish representation would be increased by World War II and by Harry Truman's postwar policies on immigration and Palestine.

*AFRICAN AMERICANS.* Economically devastated by the Depression, weary of a half-century of benign neglect by the Republican Party, blacks were ready for a political alternative. As early as 1932, dissatisfaction with Hoover and his party was palpable among the black elite. Robert Vann, publisher of the nation's most influential black newspaper, the Pittsburgh *Courier*, shocked many Republicans when he declared, "My friends, go turn Lincoln's picture to the wall. That debt has been paid in full." Although Hoover still managed to carry the black vote in 1932, Vann had seen the future. Over the next four years, no demographic group benefited so greatly from New Deal programs. In 1936, the black vote was 3-1 for Roosevelt. Vann, who had received an appointment in the Department of Justice, became a prominent member of an informal administration black advisory group known as the "black cabinet." He and others like him spoke to a constituency that cared more about the food Roosevelt had put on the table than about his lack of interest in civil rights legislation. The time for the latter would come after World War II.<sup>29</sup>

*LABOR.* Organized labor, made a permanent part of the American political economy by the Wagner Act of 1935, emerged as a potent campaign force, a big contributor of money to the Democrats as well as a major source of organization and manpower. Its role would loom larger and larger as traditional urban machines decayed in one city after another over the next couple

of decades. From 1948 through 1968 Democratic presidential campaigns would start with the nominee speaking to large union rallies on Labor Day in Detroit's Cadillac Square. For a time it appeared that the Democrats were well along the path to becoming a de facto counterpart of the British Labor Party, a prospect welcomed not simply by the unions but also by an increasingly influential liberal policy intelligentsia.

*THE CITIES.* Ethnoreligious minorities, working classes, and organized labor were of course all centered in the cities, which supported Roosevelt overwhelmingly. "Labor" included heavy representations of the white minority groups listed above, but old-stock working-class Americans also voted heavily for FDR. Roosevelt carried not only ethnic manufacturing centers like Lowell, Massachusetts, and Flint, Michigan, but also Tulsa and Oklahoma City, not just Cleveland and Chicago but also Kansas City and Los Angeles. Of the 106 cities in the country with a population over 100,000, Roosevelt carried 104.

*THE "LIBERAL INTELLECTUALS."* From the beginning of his presidency, Roosevelt had enjoyed the support of an emergent group of policy-oriented intellectuals who had rejected the conservative, business-oriented Republican dominance of the 1920s but who, unlike those on the independent left, wanted to work within the Democratic Party. Political journalists, lawyers, social workers, academic social scientists, "intellectuals" by virtue of education, some were egalitarian ideologues motivated by a social-democratic vision, others pragmatists dedicated to the use of human intelligence in solving practical social problems, and not a few (after the example of the great philosopher-activist John Dewey) were both.

Most wanted a society characterized by a more equitable distribution of wealth. Many saw strong government management of the economy as a means both of achieving that goal and of smoothing out the business cycle. Increasingly, they identified themselves with the causes of (racial) civil rights and expanded civil liberties. Inside the New Deal, they provided much of the management and policy conceptualization. Outside the administration, they might be writers for such left-liberal magazines as the *New Republic*, *The Nation*, or *Common Sense*; a few might be found on Capitol Hill working for liberal Democratic legislators.

Like all participants in the political process, they doubtless found the idea of power for themselves and their "class" attractive; all the same, they were less self-interested in the conventional sense than almost any of the groups attracted to the New Deal. Most deplored Roosevelt's compromises and saw

the New Deal as only a very partial realization of their blueprints for a perfect society. At bottom, however, most of them loved him as they would no other politician. Numerically insignificant, they were important as idea people, publicists, and organizers. They would support FDR to the end, feel just mild about Harry Truman, find a close approximation of their ideal in Adlai Stevenson, be wary of John Kennedy, and reject Lyndon Johnson.

*FARMERS.* Perhaps the most volatile segment of the electorate, farmers constituted nearly a quarter of the population in the 1930s, and thus were an imposing voting bloc. (By 1960 they would be down to less than 9 percent.<sup>30</sup>) Roosevelt carried farm areas easily in a vote that reflected widespread gratitude for the way in which the New Deal had saved rural America from liquidation. After that, however, the relationship would cool quickly. Farm prices fell in the late 1930s because of the recession of 1937–38 and surpluses that outpaced the government's ability to curtail them. Moreover, the administration's increasing identification with labor and the urban minorities made it less attractive to what was, after all, a culturally traditional segment of the population.

*THE SOUTH.* Still homogenous, overwhelmingly old-stock WASP, aggressively white supremacist, mainly rural and small-town, distrustful of labor unions and outsiders, the South (that is, the states of the Confederacy) had been reliably Democratic since Reconstruction, with the one exception of the Smith-Hoover campaign of 1928. The most impoverished region of the country, it had received a disproportionate amount of assistance from the New Deal. In 1936 and subsequent years it would be solidly for Roosevelt, but its ideological and cultural divergences from the overall trajectory of the party raised serious doubts about the future.

Stripped to its enduring essentials, the Democratic Party of 1936 looked a lot like the bargain that Jefferson and Madison had made with Aaron Burr in the 1790s, but now the order of power and influence was reversed. The center of gravity (intellectually as well as numerically) now lay not in the agrarian South but in the bustling cities of the industrial North. Roosevelt could not have been reelected in 1940 and 1944 without his overwhelming urban majorities; in both cases, he would have won without a single electoral vote from the South.

*PRESIDENTIAL PARTY VS. CONGRESSIONAL PARTY.* Yet what he had created was a presidential electoral coalition that bore only a tenuous relation-

ship to the realities of power in Congress. In the American constitutional system, presidential and congressional electoral systems are not designed to be in sync; from the late 1930s into the 1960s, the divergence would become especially pronounced among Democrats, sharply divided between presidential and congressional parties.

The different balance of power in Congress was partly attributable to the underrepresentation of urban America still common in the state legislatures that redrew congressional districts every decade. It also stemmed, however, from the undeniable fact that minorities (whether ethnic, religious, or racial) were less able to leverage their voting power in 531 House and Senate races than in a national presidential election. The labor/social-democratic nature of the worldview that had attached itself to their political emergence was a hard ideological sell.

Roosevelt, probably more pushed by the pressure of events than purposefully leading, had created a coalition that made the Democrats a majority party without ending the divisions among its factions. Within a year of his astounding victory in 1936, his power was waning and American politics was headed toward a deadlock of democracy.<sup>31</sup>

The immediate precipitants were:

*THE COURT-PACKING PLAN.* This was the move that began the sharp slide in FDR's authority. He had neither made the Supreme Court an issue in the 1936 campaign nor discussed legislation with his leaders in Congress. He much too slickly presented the bill as a method of dealing with tired blood on the Court rather than of getting his way in a dispute with it. The public and many congressmen perceived an attempt to subvert the Constitution. The president had only himself to blame for the disaster that followed. By the time it was over, he had shown that he could be successfully opposed on an important issue.

*THE RECESSION OF 1937–38.* Here, Capitol Hill had to share the blame with the White House. Many safely reelected moderate to conservative Democratic legislators saw no more need for the WPA and allied programs. New Deal tax policy and the generally poisonous relations with the business community surely contributed to the economic debacle.

*THE UPSURGE OF LABOR MILITANCY.* Strongly identified with the unions, Roosevelt could not escape a widespread reaction against the tough, angry, class conflict-oriented organizing campaigns that began shortly after his reelection. The sit-down strikes, which captured the attention of the nation,

were a special affront to the American middle-class ethic and drew a resolution of condemnation that nearly passed the Senate. Roosevelt's attempt to wash his hands of the issue by declaring "a plague on both your houses" satisfied almost no one.<sup>32</sup>

*THE FAILED PURGE OF 1938.* Never mind that Roosevelt had every right—constitutional, legal, and moral—to campaign against Democratic congressmen who had opposed him; never mind that as party leader he may even have had a duty to do so. He affronted the sense of localism that has always been a distinguishing feature of American political parties. Worse yet, he also did it very badly, striking openly at opponents he could not topple. After the dust had cleared, he was a more diminished president than ever.

The pattern of American politics that emerged from these events was at the most visible level one in which a liberal president found himself checked by a loose, informal coalition of conservative Democrats (primarily from the South) and Republicans. Accompanying and facilitating this development was the reemergence in somewhat different form of the ideological and cultural differences that had split the party before the New Deal. The argument, to be sure, was no longer about prohibition, immigration restriction, the alleged menace of a Catholic president, or the depredations of the Ku Klux Klan. Now it was about antilynching legislation, labor unions, and, in broad terms, the New Deal's threat to the conservative interpretation of Jeffersonianism as small, frugal, locally centered government. Yet the sides to the debate were much the same as in the 1920s, and the reciprocal sense of cultural hostility was rarely suppressed. By 1938 the Democrats were two parties at odds with each other behind a common facade.

Strong Republican gains in the 1938 elections left Roosevelt all but checkmated on Capitol Hill. FDR spent much of his second term working to institutionalize established programs through the creation of a stronger presidency and a much-enlarged continuing executive bureaucracy, or "administrative state," with considerable independence from congressional and electoral control. The Executive Reorganization Act of 1939, although extensively compromised before its narrow final passage, was a significant victory. Creating the Executive Office of the President, it gave Roosevelt an institutional base unlike any enjoyed by his predecessors and allowed him considerable authority to initiate administrative changes. In 1940 he secured passage of the Ramspeck Act, which extended civil service protection to some 200,000 mid- and high-level positions in the executive bureaucracy, most of them held by administration appointees.

These developments, the political scientist Sidney Milkis has brilliantly argued, signaled that Roosevelt's commitment to his programmatic legacy was greater than his devotion to party leadership.<sup>33</sup> FDR continued, of course, to accept the role of party leader—indeed, at election time, most Democrats pressed it on him—but he had little interest in being a party unifier. He would make the point unmistakably in 1940 when, under threat of refusing a third presidential nomination, he literally forced the Democratic convention to nominate the New Dealer Henry A. Wallace as his running mate.

But what was Roosevelt institutionalizing? Alan Brinkley, the most important historian of the New Deal's later years, has argued that the political outcome of FDR's second term was "the end of reform." Early visions of a major social-economic restructuring gave way to a style of Keynesian liberalism more interested in promoting mass consumption and developing a half-formed welfare state than in undertaking a major changeover of America. The ultimate result, he argues, was a deferral of festering social problems that plague us today.<sup>34</sup> As a description of what happened in the late 1930s and was confirmed by World War II, Brinkley's account is surely accurate. Whether real alternatives existed, or whether they would have been preferable, must remain a matter of individual judgment.

## **WORLD WAR II**

The argument over the New Deal and a complex of domestic issues created the political coalitions of the 1930s, but foreign policy and World War II also affected them.<sup>35</sup> World War I had been a disaster for the Democrats, wrecking the nascent "Wilson Coalition" of 1916, breaking the health of their charismatic president, and leaving them bitterly divided. The party would emerge from World War II intact and legitimized as the vehicle of national leadership in foreign policy, yet also weakened by the corrosive effects of a total war. Moreover, the prosperity that the war made possible after 1945 created a society less amenable to the messages of class division and social reform that had served the Democrats so well in the 1930s.

However halting and inconsistent Roosevelt's pre-1939 foreign policy leadership may seem, it was in fact prescient and at times risky. Privately convinced that America could not remain isolated from the rest of the world, he did about as much as possible to prepare the country—intellectually, morally, and militarily—for the gathering storms he correctly discerned in Europe and Asia. True enough, he acquiesced in the Neutrality Acts of 1935–37,

backed away from his 1937 “quarantine” speech after a strong backlash against it, and publicly praised the Munich agreement. These need to be understood, however, as Fabian tactics practiced by a leader who wanted to take the offensive but sensed that the correlation of forces was against him. Perhaps reaction would have been different if the quarantine speech (October 1937) had not taken place against the backdrop of a national economic slide and the Munich pact (September 1938) had not occurred with the unemployment rate hovering just below 20 percent. As it was, most Americans—whether conservative Republicans, militant independent progressives, or Democrats of any stripe—were isolationists, far more concerned with the continuing depression than with the follies of Europe.

The war came anyway in September 1939. After the collapse of France in mid-1940, Roosevelt took enormous chances to prevent a Nazi victory by funneling scarce American military resources to a shaky Britain. Although these actions were enormously controversial, the war’s political impact was to propel FDR to a third term. The conflict made him seem an indispensable man, boosted the economy, and galvanized his core support. In November, he defeated Republican Wendell Willkie handily, winning nearly 55 percent of the vote, but not appreciably changing the party balance in Congress. The less committed support of 1936 had fallen away; more than ever, the working-class minorities in the big cities *were* the Roosevelt coalition.

In 1941, Roosevelt pushed ahead with Lend-Lease, aid to the Soviet Union after it was invaded, and an undeclared naval war with Germany. Most stunningly, he met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill on the United Kingdom’s newest battleship, *Prince of Wales*, off Argentia, Newfoundland, in August 1941. They issued a manifesto they called the Atlantic Charter, “a joint declaration of war aims” that declared their mutual allegiance to liberal and democratic values. Affirmations of good causes might lift British spirits, but it was beyond Roosevelt’s power to give Churchill what he really wanted—an American declaration of war against Germany. In fact, the administration barely secured legislation to extend the terms of newly trained draftees in the U.S. Army.

It is hardly surprising then that Roosevelt at times was disingenuous, even guilty of outright deception, as he attempted to cope with a self-deceptive public opinion unwilling to accept either the triumph of Nazism or full American participation in the fighting. To criticize such behavior as among the many abuses of the “imperial presidency” strikes one as far less meaningful than recognizing it as a defense of the national interest—and indeed of the ideals of liberalism and democracy. Pearl Harbor,<sup>36</sup> a consequence of



a policy toward Japan that got tougher as the Japanese allied themselves more closely to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, finally plunged the United States into a fight that Roosevelt correctly realized it could not avoid.

Roosevelt's World War II foreign policy, a presidential exercise that all but excluded Secretary of State Cordell Hull, is open to fair criticism.<sup>37</sup> It had serious contradictions that arose from his attempts to combine the approaches that had characterized the thinking of his two great political heroes—the power-driven realism of Theodore Roosevelt and the idealistic internationalism of Woodrow Wilson. The two themes were not wholly irreconcilable, but the tension was obvious and the practical difficulties of juggling them were great. Roosevelt was a magnificent rhetorical leader who justified the sacrifices of the war with visions of a worldwide democratic utopia—four freedoms (of speech, of religion, from want, from fear) “everywhere in the world.” He named the wartime alliance “the United Nations,” and consistently depicted it as a force fighting for democracy and the common man. Yet he also was capable of making deals with fascists and their sympathizers—especially if it would further such military gains as the capitulation of the French in North Africa or the surrender of Italy. Most glaringly, he accepted as senior partners in the alliance not only the broken-down, militaristic government of Chiang Kai-shek in China but also Stalin's Soviet Union, a totalitarian despotism capable of matching Nazi Germany evil for evil (and its ally for a critical twenty-two months at the beginning of the war).

Such inconsistencies were not the work of a flighty mind; they possessed the virtue of necessity. The Western democracies could not have won World War II without the Soviet alliance. Yet the difficulties of squaring sweeping idealistic objectives with the harder realities of power encouraged an ad hoc diplomacy that jumped nervously from issue to issue, postponed hard decisions about the postwar world, and placed excessive emphasis on friendly relations between the men at the top. Roosevelt mistakenly assumed the continued viability of Britain as a great power (even while pursuing an anticolonial policy that anticipated the dismemberment of the British empire) and never worked out a realistic scenario for postwar East Asia. Worried about American public opinion, he never engaged in the sort of frank *realpolitik* that alone might have established a satisfactory basis for dealing with Stalin and the USSR after the war. Despite his private understanding that balance and accord among the great powers would be the only basis for a postwar settlement, he found himself mortgaging American diplomacy to the establishment of a United Nations organization and the accompanying illusion that total war would bring in its wake total peace.

Nonetheless, FDR successfully mobilized the United States for total war, kept the Grand Alliance together, and protected American interests around the world. It was primarily geographical isolation and economic power that allowed the United States, alone among the major nations of World War II, to emerge with enhanced strength; but Roosevelt did much to establish the conditions for that development. When he died with ultimate victory in sight, a majority of Americans perceived him as a heroic leader who had brought the country through unprecedented ordeals with its ideals and institutions intact.

Yet, however much Roosevelt had established the Democrats as *the* party of leadership in crisis, the war also eroded the party's strength in significant ways. The casualty lists, high taxes (withheld from paychecks for the first time), and shortages of consumer goods—all affected about every American. The use of New Deal-style federal agencies to develop and enforce price control and rationing aroused considerable resentment among farmers and businessmen. Millions of ordinary Americans had episodic difficulty finding objects as mundane as razor blades, a new set of tires, or a decent cut of meat. Labor strikes, infrequent to be sure, aroused widespread popular outrage when they occurred, or even were threatened.

The congressional election of 1942 was a particularly grim experience for New Deal Democrats. The party barely maintained control of Congress. Roosevelt faced a hostile conservative majority on Capitol Hill and experienced a near-collapse of his personal leadership, even among many legislators who agreed with him on policy issues. In 1944, Alben Barkley dramatized the new situation by resigning as Senate majority leader in protest against FDR's veto of a tax bill. He was unanimously reelected by Democratic senators in a show of solidarity that amounted to a direct slap at the president, who had to respond with a conciliatory "Dear Alben" letter.

It is one of the ironies of World War II that the United States, which suffered less than any other major combatant and organized with supreme success to provide the wherewithal for victory, experienced the greatest backlash against big government and a powerful state. The classical liberal distrust of the state that permeated American history had much to do with the reaction. But so also did the American geographical isolation from the terrors of warfare. In nations under attack, whether Allied or Axis, the state was an all-powerful source of protection and sustenance, organizing defenses against the depredations of feared enemies, resettling the victims of bombings, overseeing the fair distribution of scarce rations, providing medical care for civilian and soldier alike, embodying the spirit of a national identity. In America, it was unnecessary for

the government to provide such services; instead to millions of its citizens, it became a nuisance, exacting from them one petty sacrifice after another and at times laying claim on the life or limb of a loved family member. However justified the war might seem as an abstract matter, the sacrifices remained irritants, leading increasing numbers of citizens to wonder if the New Deal state was not too big and too meddlesome.

In the presidential election year of 1944, the Democrats turned once again to Roosevelt. Whatever the political setbacks of the war, whatever the restiveness among dissidents, he clearly was the only candidate who could lead the party to victory. All the same, the president was weakened enough that he consented to the dumping of Vice President Wallace, who had been a model of ineptness in his congressional relations and was widely disliked by party conservatives and moderates. The new running mate was Senator Harry S. Truman, a New Deal supporter who enjoyed widespread popularity in both houses of Congress. The Roosevelt coalition, tattered about the edges, held firm despite FDR's own visibly worn health, the multitude of resentments he had accumulated over twelve years, and all the strains of the war. It was bolstered by an important mobilization of organized labor. The Congress of Industrial Organizations established the CIO Political Action Committee, which provided resources and organization that may have been decisive in some large industrial states. On Election Day, Roosevelt defeated Thomas Dewey, polling about 53.3 percent of the vote and once again finding his decisive majorities in the cities.

The Democrats gained twenty-four seats in the House but lost two in the Senate. The conservative coalition and the divergent congressional party remained intact. The 1940 elections had left the party with 66 senators and 268 representatives; the 1944 elections returned 56 Democratic senators and 242 representatives.

Franklin Roosevelt at the top of his form would have found it necessary to yield much of his program to such a Congress. The Roosevelt who began his fourth term was suffering from the effects of chronic hypertension, an affliction for which, in those days, there was no good treatment. Chronically fatigued, he was in truth not physically fit to continue as president. A horrified Truman told a friend that FDR "had the pallor of death on his face."<sup>38</sup> His last overseas trip, a crucial meeting with Stalin and Churchill at Yalta in the Soviet Crimea, exacted a fearsome toll. On March 1, 1945, he reported on the Yalta conference before a joint session of Congress. Worn in appearance, unable to stand, he delivered a rambling speech in a tired voice. The performance failed to satisfy his critics and confirmed the worst

fears of his friends. Six weeks later, April 12, 1945, he died suddenly at his Warm Springs, Georgia, retreat.

Roosevelt left behind not simply a record of victory in four presidential elections but also a transformed Democratic Party. What remained uncertain, however, was whether that party had an independent viability or whether it was, at bottom, a personal creation that would fly apart in his absence. Even if it could be held together, moreover, could any successor effect an ideological unification that would bring the Democratic congressional party back into line with the Democratic presidential party? It would be up to Harry S. Truman to provide the answers.

### **THE MAINTAINING PRESIDENCY OF HARRY S. TRUMAN**

Truman's presidency demonstrated that a chief executive lacking the assets that had meant so much to Roosevelt—style, charm, media charisma—could make much of his office.<sup>39</sup> Truman assuredly deserves credit for the virtues that made him one of the most important twentieth-century American presidents—hard work, determination, shrewd political judgment, and gutsy decision-making. For all his differences in style and personality from FDR, he also showed that individuals make a difference. Consider what likely would have happened to the Democratic Party under President Henry A. Wallace.

The Truman presidency demonstrated that the Roosevelt coalition, and the fact of a presumptive Democratic majority, possessed a social and political basis that extended beyond Roosevelt—and that it could be rallied by a midwesterner with a considerably different cultural identity. A product of an urban political machine, Truman understood the New Deal coalition and its imperatives. A committed ideological progressive from his earliest years, he moved naturally to a liberal course. He also showed that the party required a strong man in the White House in order to hold it together, shape its identity, and give it the leadership necessary to win national elections. Finally, his years in office confirmed that the Democratic presidential-congressional split was an enduring fact of national life.

If Truman demonstrated that there was life after Roosevelt for the Democrats, the roller-coaster ups and downs of his years in the White House equally displayed the party's continuing internal contradictions. By the end of 1946, Truman, pulled between one Democratic faction and another, seemingly inef-

fective in his management of the economy, looked like a failure. The Republicans especially capitalized on a failed attempt to control meat prices that had succeeded only driving supply off the market. Using the slogan “Had enough?” the GOP swept to victory in the mid-term elections, winning control of Congress for the first time since 1928. Once in power, they quickly realized their major objective, passing the antilabor Taft-Hartley Act over Truman’s veto. With near unanimity, pundits proclaimed the Democratic era at an end.

Remarkably, it was not. The Truman years, by and large, constituted a maintaining period rather than a transforming one. Just how did Truman manage to hold together a party that seemed to be on the verge of flying apart?

*CENTRIST LIBERALISM.* Truman picked up the heritage of the New Deal and added to it a series of his own programs (which he would call the Fair Deal in his second term) that seemed logical extensions. The broad public was not ready for most of them (national health insurance, federal aid to education, comprehensive civil rights legislation, repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act, the Brannan Plan for agriculture). The one item that did get through Congress, large-scale public housing in 1949, is widely adjudged a failure.

All the same Truman had defined an agenda for the next generation of liberal activism. His Fair Deal appealed to a substantial majority of nonsouthern Democrats who engaged themselves with policy issues; it maintained the allegiance of such critical constituencies as organized labor, African Americans, and the liberal intelligentsia. What made it distinctive and gave it enduring significance was the way in which it adjusted Democratic liberalism to the new and apparently permanent prosperity that had emerged from World War II.

Truman’s most momentous addition to the liberal agenda was civil rights.<sup>40</sup> His ideas about race—he thought in terms of “equal opportunity” rather than “social equality”—may seem primitive today, but in the immediate postwar years they were enlightened. Like Roosevelt before him, he preferred to dodge racial issues, but the end of the Depression made it impossible to satisfy African Americans with distributional politics. As fairness and constitutional rights became the primary objectives of blacks and their white liberal allies, Truman had no fundamental inhibitions about taking up their cause. He deserves more credit than he usually gets for his civil rights stand. Inevitably, however, it added considerably to the centrifugal forces within the Democratic coalition.

The first president to offer a comprehensive civil rights program, he was never able to get legislation past a southern filibuster in the Senate, but he

took major steps in other ways. His Justice department submitted a series of path-breaking *amicus curiae* briefs to the Supreme Court; they placed the executive branch squarely in favor of reversing *Plessy v. Ferguson* and thus set the stage for the *Brown* decision of 1954. Despite determined opposition from the military bureaucracy, Truman desegregated the armed forces, thereby creating an integrated world that touched the lives of millions of Americans before desegregation became a norm in the 1960s.

*GROWTH ECONOMICS.* After his election victory in 1948, Truman adjusted Democratic liberalism to postwar prosperity in one other critical way. Under the leadership of Leon Keyserling, the second chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, the administration abandoned Depression-era assumptions about an economy of scarcity.<sup>41</sup> Instead, it began to promote economic growth as a more fundamental objective of liberalism.

Because Truman's years in office were characterized by a full employment economy in every year save 1949, this change was more in the realm of rhetoric than of policy. Keyserling, an eclectic thinker who lacked a Ph.D. in economics, never developed an elegant theoretical formula. He simply asserted that the federal government should employ all the tools at its disposal to concentrate single-mindedly on enlarging the economy; other problems would take care of themselves. He understood that only economic growth could fund the major objective of Democratic liberalism—the steady development of a state with bigger and better social programs.

The “stagflation” of the Eisenhower years would give a special relevance to Keyserling's message and keep it at the top of the Democratic agenda. Walter Heller and other academic economists in the meantime developed a theoretical neo-Keynesian rationale for growth economics.<sup>42</sup> John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson would adopt their proposals in the 1960s and pursue what appeared a promising growth program, built around the tax cut of 1964, before Vietnam overheated the economy. Thereafter, partly because of mounting concern over the environmental consequences, partly because of the party's difficulties in controlling inflation, rapid growth would lose its salience on the Democratic economic agenda. Amazingly, in the 1980s the issue would be captured by the Republicans under Ronald Reagan, talking Kennedy-style tax cuts but devoted to private investment and consumption rather than social democracy.

*ANTICOMMUNISM.* Leaving aside their substantial merits, Truman's Cold War policies had the tactical advantage of disconnecting the party from what

had become an embarrassing alliance with the Soviet Union and American Communists. The Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan protected American interests in Europe and the Middle East while sustaining liberal democracy in such countries as France and Italy. The president's diplomacy also provided a focus for a debate on the left wing of the party that led to the expulsion of Communists and pro-Communist "Popular Fronters" from the organized liberal movement and leading labor unions. Henry Wallace and the 1948 Progressives probably did more good for Truman by running against him than by remaining a conspicuous pro-Soviet faction within the Democratic Party.

Truman's anticommunist policies were, to be sure, not perfect. His diplomacy was well crafted, thanks in no small part to a highly professional Department of State. Its domestic extensions, however, included an ill-conceived loyalty program for the entire federal civil service and the even worse decision to prosecute the leaders of the American Communist Party under the Smith Act. Truman himself came to realize that the loyalty program was a mistake, courageously (although unsuccessfully) vetoed the McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950, and emerged as a defender of civil liberties against the assaults of Senator Joseph McCarthy and others on the right.

In his diplomacy, as with his domestic reform program, Truman aligned himself with what Arthur Schlesinger Jr., characterized as Vital Center liberalism. Rejecting the totalitarianism of the left as well as that of the right, advocating civil liberties and democratic politics at home and abroad, renouncing full-scale socialism in favor of enhanced social welfarism, Vital Center liberalism could reach a wide audience within the Democratic Party, not least among them large ethnoreligious minorities that were bitterly anti-Soviet.

*TRUMAN'S LEADERSHIP.* In the end, it was Truman himself who defined what the Democratic Party meant in the immediate postwar years and then sold that definition to the American people in 1948. His foreign policy surely helped him. In his first term, by mutual understanding with the Republicans, it was bipartisan and not a matter of debate. During the campaign of 1948, Truman's authorization put U.S. military transports in the air around the clock to thwart the Soviet-imposed blockade of Berlin.

Another foreign policy issue had important political ramifications. The Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine might seem a bit of a sideshow when contrasted to the U.S.-Soviet confrontation in Europe, but the electoral stakes were large. Here also there was no real difference between the two parties; leaders in both generally sympathized with the concept of some sort of Jew-

ish political entity in Palestine. But with the Jewish population overwhelmingly committed to the Democratic Party and Jewish leaders wielding substantial influence within it, Truman faced the toughest pressures.

As president, he struggled desperately with the issue of Palestine throughout his first term, striving to make decisions that would reconcile the national interest with his political interests. In May 1948, over the protests of the State Department, he ordered recognition of the newly proclaimed state of Israel. For the rest of the year he would acquiesce in the department's resistance to further concessions, but what he had done was enough to hold the bulk of the Jewish vote. During his second term, the U.S.-Israeli relationship became closer, establishing a pattern of support for the Jewish state that became a *sine qua non* of Democratic foreign policy thereafter.

The campaign of 1948 was largely about competing visions of domestic policy, which meant it was about liberalism. In itself that did not necessarily bode well for the Democrats. Truman was smart enough to realize that his initiatives had limited appeal. A Congress controlled by Democrats in 1945–46 had been about as unwilling to do anything with them as had the Republican Congress of 1947–48. The Taft-Hartley Act had been supported by a majority of the Democratic delegation in the House. The civil rights program he had sent up to Congress in early 1948 attracted little public enthusiasm in the North and was fearsomely unpopular in the South.

The president never repudiated anything in his own agenda, although he would have soft-pedaled civil rights in the Democratic platform; as it was, a floor revolt led by Hubert Humphrey, the dynamic young mayor of Minneapolis, obtained a full-scale commitment to every point in the civil rights program. "The time has come," Humphrey declared on the convention floor, "for the Democratic Party to get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk into the bright sunshine of human rights."<sup>43</sup> He and his liberal allies nailed the banner of civil rights to the Democratic Party for once and for all. They also precipitated a walkout of delegates from Alabama and Mississippi. Shortly afterward, a new States Rights Party would nominate Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina for president. The "Dixiecrats" had only one *raison d'être*—to deny the South, and the presidency, to Truman. Realizing that conciliation of the South was impossible, the president had quickly issued an executive order desegregating the armed forces. During the campaign he became the first chief executive ever to speak in Harlem. African American leaders, who understood they were in a contest with the white South to determine who held the balance of power in a presidential election, took note. But the election was not primarily about civil rights.



Truman waged a grueling, fiery campaign in which he established himself as a plain-talking leader fighting for the common people against a fat-cat opposition. Leaving Washington on his first big swing around the country, he told his running mate, Senator Alben Barkley, "I'll mow 'em down Alben, and I'll give 'em hell."<sup>44</sup> Over the next several weeks, he described the Republicans as "gluttons of privilege" aching to oppress farmers and workers. If at times his rhetoric was excessive, many voters found the persona of the fighting underdog appealing. His campaign train drew large and friendly crowds at one stop after another.

A solid strategy lay behind the tactics. Truman made the election into a referendum on Roosevelt's New Deal. Crisscrossing the country, making hundreds of speeches, he repeatedly accused the Republicans of wanting to repeal the New Deal and turn the clock back to the 1920s. In a feat of political jujitsu, he converted the Democratic defeat of 1946 into a stroke of good fortune. No one, after all, could expect him to have gotten anything from a Republican Congress—even if he had done so brilliantly on foreign policy issues—and the Republicans, especially those in the House, had managed to appear inflexibly negative. Truman's opponent, Thomas E. Dewey—governor of New York, cool personification of the organization man, a sure winner—never stooped to answer the president's charges.

It is overly simple, of course, to describe any presidential election as merely an ideological plebiscite. Truman's intensive campaigning no doubt heated up the blood of a lot of Democratic partisans whose loyalty to the party had little to do with programs and platforms. His fighting underdog role surely enhanced his personal appeal. Still, in the end, all explanations come back to Truman's defense of the New Deal. Roosevelt's achievements were established beyond recall. Truman polled 49.5 percent of the popular vote, Dewey 45 percent. Thurmond and Wallace received about 2.4 percent each; Thurmond carried Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina for thirty-nine electoral votes. Wallace pulled enough votes away from the Democrats to throw Maryland, Michigan, and New York to Dewey. The count was close enough that numerous groups could claim some credit for the victory—African Americans motivated by civil rights, farmers who resented cuts in the agricultural program, labor in support of Truman's Taft-Hartley veto. The important question, however, was just what sort of a mandate Truman had.

The answer, to put it simply, was "not much." The public had voted *against* a largely fanciful threat to established New Deal programs they had come to cherish, not *for* a lot of new legislation. The Democrats had regained control

of Congress, but by margins in the House almost the same as those of 1938, the election that had given birth to the conservative coalition; in the Senate, they had only a 54–42 edge. Truman would get some very significant enlargements of Social Security and other ornaments from the 1930s. However, aside from the Housing Act of 1949, the Fair Deal would run into a brick wall. What the president had done in 1948 was to arrest the disintegration of the party and just barely preserve the Roosevelt coalition, right down to maintaining its internal gridlock.

Perhaps most critically, the South emerged with more potential power within the party than in years, despite the apparent failure of the Thurmond candidacy. The South had been irrelevant to Roosevelt's four victories; Truman had won the election only because he had held on to most of it. If in addition to the four states he carried Thurmond had won Texas and any other two southern states, Truman would have failed to attain a majority in the Electoral College, leaving the contest to be decided by the House of Representatives.

If the Republicans could have laid claim to all those electoral votes, Dewey would have been elected. There already were plenty of stirrings of independence in Texas, where Governor Coke Stevenson had been friendly to the Dixiecrats and Houston publisher Jesse H. Jones, a leader of conservative Democrats in the Roosevelt years, had endorsed Dewey. The vision of a South, anti-civil rights and conservative in its broader outlook, voting Republican in presidential elections suddenly was by no means outlandish. It was probably the mathematics of his victory as much as anything that impelled Truman to avoid retaliation against the Dixiecrats and reject efforts to reduce southern influence in Congress after 1948.

Numerous developments cemented the gridlock—the fall of China, the Soviet A-bomb, the Hiss case, the Rosenberg case, and, above all, the Korean War. Truman faced the unexpected invasion of South Korea with decisiveness and fortitude. As soon as he was informed of North Korea's move across the thirty-eighth parallel, he told his secretary of state, Dean Acheson, "Dean, we've got to stop the sons of bitches no matter what."<sup>45</sup> The price was high—a stalled domestic program, a prolonged, stalemated war after China intervened, and a surge of hysterical anticommunism that engulfed the administration. By the end of 1950, McCarthyism had become a dominating force in American politics, the Democrats had given back some of their gains in Congress, and Truman was circling the wagons to defend his foreign policy. He had to unite the party behind a holding action in Korea, the dismissal of General Douglas MacArthur for insubordination, and a sharp military expansion to insure the defense of Europe. Revelations of small-bore corrup-

tion in the administration added to the damage. In 1952, a Republican strategist would describe the formula for his party's campaign as K-1, C-2: Korea, Communism, corruption.

Truman was by then a spent force politically, although feistier and more vehement than ever in his campaigning. The Republican candidate, Dwight D. Eisenhower, eclipsed Dewey in charisma and political savvy; significantly, he went out of his way to reassure the voters explicitly that he would pose no threat to the achievements of the Roosevelt era. This pledge, given with at least a degree of reluctance, underscored Truman's accomplishment. If he had been unable to achieve his Fair Deal program, he had demonstrated that a broad national consensus supported the New Deal. Republicans from Eisenhower on understood the lesson. Even the "Reagan Revolution" would be largely a reaction against the Great Society and the 1960s, not the New Deal.

Truman also had committed the Democratic Party to a foreign policy that both Republicans and Democrats would follow for a generation—active involvement in the world with the objective of establishing a liberal international order while containing expansionist totalitarianism in the form of the Soviet empire. Pursued with varying degrees of activism and passivity, skill and ineptness by his successors, frequently denounced by utopians of both the liberal left and the conservative right, containment nonetheless remained the guiding principle of American foreign policy until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Roosevelt and Truman between them had created a new Democratic Party—one with nearly unlimited faith in activist government, social-democratic policies, and a commitment to the rights of minorities, even those with black skin; one that dedicated the United States to continuing international involvement against the menace of Communist totalitarianism; one that, whatever its internal contradictions, was the dominant majority in American politics at the level of Congress and the statehouses. In 1952, that achievement seemed about as enduring as anything could be in American politics.

Vietnam, the New Left, and the counterculture were less than a decade and a half away.

## NOTES

This essay is a substantially revised and enlarged version of an article originally published in Peter B. Kovler, ed., *Democrats and the American Idea* (Washington, D.C.: Center for National Policy Press, 1992).

1. There is a significant, if rather dated, literature about the issue of change and continuity during this period, focusing on the New Deal and the Great Depression. See, for example, Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), chap. 7, parts 3 and 4; Carl Degler, *Out of Our Past* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), chap. 12; William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), chap. 14; Richard S. Kirkendall, "The Great Depression: Another Watershed in American History?" in John Braeman et al., *Change and Continuity in Twentieth-Century America* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964); and Otis L. Graham, *Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). The question is protean and ultimately irresolvable; still, it is an important one that forces one to think through fundamental issues of twentieth-century American history.

2. To attempt to divine the "true" meaning of the term *Jeffersonian* would be to embark on an endless tangent. Suffice to say that all the meanings in the text had acquired some currency by the early twentieth century. Those who would like to delve further into the problem should consult Merrill Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Merrill Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Noble E. Cunningham Jr., *In Pursuit of Reason: The Life of Thomas Jefferson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

3. David Burner, *The Politics of Provincialism: The Democratic Party in Transition, 1918–1932* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), a book of considerable merit and after thirty-five years the best single volume on its subject. See also Alan Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979). Two classic works on American politics and society in the 1920s are William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914–1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), and John D. Hicks, *Republican Ascendancy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960); both are written from a "progressive" perspective that has much in common with the classic worldview of the Democratic Party. Ellis W. Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order*, 2d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), deemphasizes standard partisan ideology in favor of an "organizational-managerial" interpretation that stresses the growth of public and private bureaucracies, the emergence of specialized professional expertise, and consequent redefinitions of the nature of the state.

4. Two classic works on the causes and character of the Great Depression are Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); and John A. Garraty, *The Great Depression* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986). For an interesting, albeit to my mind unconvincing, revisionist interpretation of Hawley-Smoot, see Alfred E. Eckes, *Opening America's*

*Markets: U.S. Foreign Trade Policy since 1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), chap. 4. On Federal Reserve policy, see Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), chap. 7.

5. *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975) 1:135, 224, 483; 2:1038.

6. Martin L. Fausold, *The Presidency of Herbert C. Hoover* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985), provides a thorough and authoritative account of Hoover's efforts and failures.

7. See Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, vol. 2, *The Year of Crisis, 1933* (New York: Random House, 1938), 11–16, for the formal prepared text. For description of the event and for the text as actually delivered, see *New York Times*, March 5, 1933.

8. See, for example, David Sarasohn, *The Party of Reform: Democrats in the Progressive Era* (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 1989); Robert Cherney, *Righteous Cause: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985); Le Roy Ashby, *William Jennings Bryan: Champion of Democracy* (Boston: Twayne, 1987); Paolo E. Coletta, *William Jennings Bryan*, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964–69); Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910–1917* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), *Wilson: The New Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), and *Wilson: Campaigns for Progressivism and Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965); John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), and Cooper, *Pivotal Decades: The United States, 1900–1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), chap. 9 (note especially the illustration on p. 250).

9. The scholarly literature on Roosevelt and the New Deal is vast. David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), is now the standard single-volume work. William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, remains a classic interpretation. Other important interpretations include Anthony Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1989); James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), a thoughtful and provocative liberal critique; Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990); Patrick Maney, *F.D.R.: The Roosevelt Presence* (New York: Twayne, 1992). Paul K. Conkin, *The New Deal*, 3d ed. (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1992) is a brief critique from the left in the pragmatic, social democratic tradition of John Dewey. Jordan Schwarz, *The New Dealers: Power Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), examines the New Deal as a species of “state capitalism.” Colin Gordon, *New Deals:*

*Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920–1935* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), approaches the topic from a perspective that combines the “organizational-managerial” interpretation with what appears to be a loose neo-Marxism reminiscent of the early work of Gabriel Kolko. On the World War I experience, see especially William E. Leuchtenburg, “The New Deal and the Analogue of War,” in *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 35–75, an important pioneering essay. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Roosevelt*, 3 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957–60), is a celebratory, scholarly, and near-definitive blending of history and biography covering the years 1929–36. John Braeman et al., eds., *The New Deal: The National Level* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), is an important collection of original essays.

10. Among the many works on New Deal policy toward various sectors of the economy, the following are possibly the most useful: Ellis W. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966); Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: The American Worker, 1929–1939* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969); and Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1982).

11. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 68.

12. *Historical Statistics* 1:135.

13. John Maynard Keynes to Franklin D. Roosevelt, February 1, 1938, reproduced in Howard Zinn, ed., *New Deal Thought* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 403–409.

14. For an early and very influential example, see Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*, 328–336.

15. Garraty, *The Great Depression*, 197; R. J. Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

16. *Historical Statistics* 2:1105.

17. On tax policy, the most comprehensive treatment is Mark Leff, *The Limits of Symbolic Reform: The New Deal and Taxation, 1933–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), a work that is, however, written from a social-democratic, redistributionist frame of reference quite different from my own.

18. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 183–184.

19. Keynes to Roosevelt, February 1, 1938, in Zinn, ed., *New Deal Thought*, 403–409.

20. Richard Vedder and Lowell Gallaway, *Out of Work: Unemployment and Government in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993), especially chap. 7, is an important, although perhaps exaggerated, statement of the thesis that maximum employment occurs only when government lets the cost of labor fall to its natural market level. Along these lines, it is worth noting also that German full employment was achieved at the cost of lower worker real wages and living standards

than in the peak year of 1928. To be sure, part of this decline reflected Hitler's guns-over-butter decision to push military production at the expense of civilian goods after 1935, but it may be an irreducible fact that it is easier even (especially?) for a totalitarian regime to create many jobs with mediocre compensation than an equal number with good compensation. See Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery*, especially chap. 2.

21. On the administration incomprehension of small business, see, for example, Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 90–91.

22. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 154.

23. Keynes to Roosevelt, February 1, 1938, in Zinn, ed., *New Deal Thought*, 403–409.

24. Roosevelt was perhaps foremost among a generation of political leaders that used the new media to great effect. Adolf Hitler in Germany is perhaps the most noted example, but Stanley Baldwin in Great Britain, who delivered his first radio address in 1924, was surely the pioneer and was far more formidable than generally remembered today. Each, it must be emphasized, was able to use the modern media as a vehicle of charisma because he spoke in the idiom of his own political culture, not only addressing its greatest concerns but also expressing its distinctive mood. See, for example, David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 1993), 30–34, and Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 83–87.

25. Vedder and Gallaway, *Out of Work*, 77.

26. WPA workers often demonstrated and engaged in letter-writing campaigns in favor of continued appropriations for either their specific projects or for the agency in general. Occasionally they attempted to form labor unions. Sometimes they actually called strikes for better wages or working conditions; invariably these were put down with a decisiveness akin to that with which Ronald Reagan smashed the air-traffic controllers' walkout.

27. On this point see Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, a justly acclaimed melding of cultural and political history).

28. Schwarz, *The New Dealers*, discusses the issue of Jews in the New Deal at several points, esp. 146 and 181.

29. On African Americans and the New Deal, see Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1970); John B. Kirby, *Black Americans and the Roosevelt Era* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980); and Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

30. *Historical Statistics* 1:457.

31. This phrase and the interpretive design are taken from James MacGregor Burns, *The Deadlock of Democracy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), a classic of popular political science.

32. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal*, 243.

33. Sidney M. Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System since the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii–ix, chaps. 1–6.

34. Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, especially the introduction and epilogue.

35. The following surveys of American life in World War II are important general works: Richard Polenberg, *War and Society* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972); Geoffrey Perrett, *Days of Sadness, Years of Triumph* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973); John M. Blum, *"V" Was for Victory* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976); William L. O'Neill, *A Democracy at War* (New York: Free Press, 1993); and John J. Jeffries, *Wartime America* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1996).

36. After sixty years one still sees new books and "documentaries" charging that Roosevelt knew of the Pearl Harbor attack plans and, for the sake of getting into the war, did nothing to stop them. Aside from the lack of convincing evidence for this thesis, it is inconceivable that Roosevelt, even if he wanted war, would have left the Pacific fleet exposed. Surely it is more likely that he would have deployed American air and naval power to beat off the attack and strike a surprise counterblow against the Japanese fleet. Such a stroke would have given him the war he *may* have wanted and would have started it with a U.S. victory.

37. Among the many works on Roosevelt as a diplomatist, Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), remains standard. Other studies of considerable importance are James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970); John L. Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt As Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Frederick W. Marks III, *Wind over Sand* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

38. Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 289.

39. The authoritative history of the Truman presidency is Robert Donovan's two-volume survey *Conflict and Crisis* and *Tumultuous Years* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977, 1982). Donald R. McCoy, *The Presidency of Harry S. Truman* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984), is a more selective account by a distinguished historian.



Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pursues themes that may be of special interest to the readers of this work. Three biographies that focus as much on the man as his presidency are Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994); Hamby, *Man of the People*; and David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

40. Among the many works on civil rights and the Truman administration, the fullest and most balanced is Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1973).

41. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 297–303.

42. Walter Heller, *New Dimensions of Political Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), is an accessible introduction to the New Economics.

43. Hamby, *Man of the People*, 448.

44. Hamby, *Man of the People*, 462.

45. Hamby, *Man of the People*, 534.

