Criticism of the New Deal

I. Eleanor Roosevelt
   a. Controversial First Lady – wrote a newspaper column, made radio broadcasts, traveled, constantly gave speeches, outspoken advocate of women’s rights and for the rights of minorities.
   b. Social justice and civil rights oriented
      i. Advocate for the inclusion of women in New Deal agencies
         1. Encouraged the CCC to include women (1934-1937 more than 8500 women benefited)
      ii. Behind the scenes advocate for civil rights for African-Americans
         1. In 1939 when the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow Marian Anderson (black concert singer) to use their stage, she publicly protested and resigned her membership in the DAR. She then arranged for Anderson to sing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial (75,000 people gathered to listen and support civil rights for AA)
   c. Moral center of the Roosevelt administration - helped push FDR towards social reform

II. Despite Mrs. Roosevelt’s tendency to support social reforms, President Roosevelt was often criticized for not doing enough to help women and minorities. He was also criticized by both the political right and political left for a variety of reasons.

Criticism of the New Deal:

a. Women:
   i. Men and boys got preference over women in relief and work programs
      1. Given to male “heads of family”
   ii. Social Security Act excluded domestic service workers. There was also no govt. regulation of domestic service – largest female occupation.
   iii. NIRA codes set / allowed for a lower wage for women
   iv. However, there were some positive gains made by women during FDR’s presidency:
      1. More women occupied high government positions than in any previous administration
         a. Frances Perkins = Secretary of Labor
         b. Mary Anderson = head of Women’s Bureau
         c. Katherine Lenroot = director of Children’s Bureau
         d. Molly Dewson = social worker with the MA Girls Parole Dept. and the National Consumers League before she became head of the Women’s Division of the Democratic Committee and advisor to FDR
         e. Dewson & Eleanor Roosevelt also help appoint several firsts: 2 women appt. as ambassadors, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals, the director of the mint, and many women in other govt. agencies
   i. While they did advance somewhat, most women were still relegated to jobs where they didn’t threaten men’s positions or authority – gender bias in types of jobs (social service, child oriented, etc.)

b. African-Americans (AA):
   i. AA unemployment rate was triple that of whites, and blacks often received less per person in welfare payments
   ii. AA were denied professional level jobs
   iii. Relief programs (especially those in the South) reinforced racial segregation
      1. Segregation existed on public works projects
      2. AA were paid less than whites and not allowed to do skilled jobs on dam and electrical power projects
      3. TVA model town of Norris, TN was off limits for blacks
   iv. Discrimination in New Deal programs:
      1. Social Security Act excluded farmers and domestic service workers = ignored 2/3 of working AA
      2. CCC segregated black and white workers
      3. Public Works Administration paid for segregated housing projects
AAA policies often pushed blacks off the land in the South

Many AA wrote letters to Pres. & Mrs. Roosevelt to protest discrimination in New Deal agencies

One woman from GA wrote “I can’t sign my names, Mr. President, they will beat me up and run me away from here and this is my home.”

Rise in lynching at the start of the Depression – rose from 8 in 1932 to 28 in 1933 and 20 in 1935

Scottsboro Boys – March 25, 2931 in Scottsboro, Alabama, 2 young white women accused 9 young black men of raping them in a railroad boxcar as they all hitched a free ride. A jury of all white men found all 9 black men guilty and sentenced 8 of them to die. US Sup. Ct. ordered new trials in 1933 on the grounds that the 9 men had not received proper legal counsel.

Case garnered much publicity in the U.S. and abroad – northern liberals and the Communist party

Many southerners saw the case as a matter of defending the honor of white women (“she might be a fallen woman, but by God she is a white woman.”)

Evidence supporting the rapes was never presented and eventually one of the women recanted…case still dragged on. In new trials 5 of the men were convicted and given long prison terms. Charges against the other 4 were dropped in 1944. 4 of the remaining 5 were paroled in 1944 and the 5th escaped to Michigan.

Northern migration continued during the 1930s (had started during early 1900s and accelerated during WWI) – cotton prices collapsed so no reason to stay

poorly educated = trapped in northern ghettos and menial jobs

Bills to make lynching a federal crime failed in both 1935 and 1938 as did a bill to abolish the poll tax

FDR said it was because he needed southern support for his bills in Congress (i.e. not want to jeopardize New Deal programs for a federal lynching law – particularly when his programs were already controversial

FDR was not wholeheartedly committed to civil rights (Eleanor was), however, he was not all bad:

FDR appointed over 100 AA to policy making posts during his time in office

Harry Hopkins and Harold Ickes worked to make sure blacks were given opportunities in New Deal agencies like the CCC and WPA

By 1941, there were more than 150,000 black federal employees (3x the number as there were under Hoover) – most worked in lower level positions but some were lawyers, office managers, and engineers

An independently established “black cabinet” (group of more than 50 young blacks who had appointments in almost every govt dept and New Deal agency) – met every week at Mary McLeod Bethune’s house to discuss problems and plan strategy

a. Bethune founded and led Nat. Council of Negro Women before being appointed to advisory committee of the National Youth Administration (Eleanor advised Harry Hopkins to hire her)

b. Forceful and outspoken advocate (pickets and protests) to gain civil rights and more jobs for AA (“don’t shop where you can’t work” campaigns)

c. Political Right:

Tended to be comprised of wealthy, white Americans who wanted to maintain the current system and power structure

Opposed to higher taxes on the rich

Viewed the TVA as socialistic and the SS Act as penalizing successful people

American Liberty League founded in 1934 to lead much of the right wing opposition (led by Al Smith)

Believed the New Deal limited individual freedom, was unconstitutional, and un-American

Regarded compulsory unemployment insurance as Bolshevism (Communist)

Wanted people to take responsibility for themselves (vs. the government taking care of them)

d. Political Left:

Wanted radical government change to help the common people (believed it was too closely aligned with business and the rich)

Believed the New Deal did not do enough to help fix the nation’s problems

Argued that the New Deal failed to really end poverty – signaled the revival of Progressivism in some areas
** A number of individuals also spoke out against FDR’s New Deal. Some proposed their own solutions, while others were merely content to criticize FDR’s efforts. These critics include Father Charles Coughlin, Dr. Francis Townsend and Huey Long.

In the words of Huey Long, Louisiana Senator, Presidential candidate in 1936, and promoter of a national network of Share Our Wealth Clubs:

> Now in the third year of his administration, we find more of our people unemployed than at any other time. We find our houses empty and our people hungry, many of them half-clothed and many of them not clothed at all.

> There is nothing wrong with the United States. We have more food than we can eat. We have more clothes and things out of which to make clothes than we can wear. We have more houses and lands than the whole 120 million can use if they all bad good homes. So what is the trouble? Nothing except that a handful of men have everything and the balance of the people have nothing if their debts were paid. There should be every man a king in this land flowing with milk and honey instead of the lords of finance at the top and slaves and peasants at the bottom.

Title: Share-our-wealth society is simply to mean that God’s creatures on this lovely American continent have a right to share in the wealth they have created in this country. They have the right to a living, with the conveniences and some of the luxuries of this life, so long as there are too many or enough for all. They have a right to raise their children in a healthy, wholesome atmosphere and to educate them, rather than to face the dread of their under-nourishment and sadness by being denied a real life.

Motto: "Every man a king" conveys the great plan of God and of the Declaration of Independence, which said: "All men are created equal." It conveys that no one man is the lord of another, but that from the head to the foot of every man is carried his sovereignty.

More from Huey Long…

> How many men ever went to a barbeque and would let one man take off the table what’s intended for nine-tenths of the people to eat? The only way you’ll ever be able to feed the balance of people is to make that man come back and bring back some of that grub that he ain’t got no business with!

** Opposition to FDR and his New Deal was also seen in Congress – challenges to the constitutionality of a number of New Deal programs. FDR was frustrated with the Supreme Court (there were 4 extremely conservative judges on the court who struck down the NIRA and the AAA, as well as a number of state laws from the Progressive Era as being unconstitutional.) To try to remedy the situation, FDR proposed a restructuring of the Supreme Court in 1937. His solution later came to be known as the as “Court Packing Scheme.” The Constitution does not specify the number of justices – the number had not changed since 1869 (when the number was set at 9.) FDR said he wanted to lighten the burden on the justices (as several of them were really old) by passing a reform so that he could appoint 6 or more justices (1 for each judge who was over 70 years old at the time.) The proposal was not well-received and instead was regarded as a political ploy to stuff the court with friendly justices. Ultimately, FDR was forced to withdraw his reform proposition due to criticism. In the end, it led to tremendous political damage (southern Democrats and conservative Republicans who were already against New Deal legislation saw through this attempt to pack the court = angered them even more.)