

SECTION  
**3**

# The New Deal Affects Many Groups

**MAIN IDEA**

New Deal policies and actions affected various social and ethnic groups.

**WHY IT MATTERS NOW**

The New Deal made a lasting impact on increasing the government's role in the struggle for equal rights.

**Terms & Names**

- Frances Perkins
- Mary McLeod Bethune
- John Collier
- New Deal coalition
- Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)

**One American's Story**

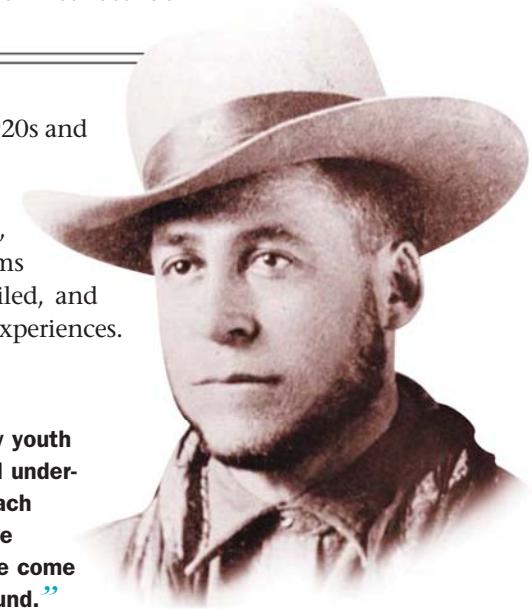
Pedro J. González came to this country from Mexico in the early 1920s and later became a United States citizen. As the first Spanish-language disc jockey in Los Angeles, González used his radio program to condemn discrimination against Mexicans and Mexican Americans, who were often made scapegoats for social and economic problems during the Depression. For his efforts, González was arrested, jailed, and deported on trumped-up charges. Later in life, he reflected on his experiences.

**A PERSONAL VOICE PEDRO J. GONZÁLEZ**

*“Seeing how badly they treated Mexicans back in the days of my youth I could have started a rebellion. But now there could be a cultural understanding so that without firing one bullet, we might understand each other. We [Mexicans] were here before they [Anglos] were, and we are not, as they still say, ‘undesirables’ or ‘wetbacks.’ They say we come to this land and it’s not our home. Actually, it’s the other way around.”*

—quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, December 9, 1984

Pedro J. González became a hero to many Mexican Americans and a symbol of Mexican cultural pride. His life reflected some of the difficulties faced by Mexicans and other minority groups in the United States during the New Deal era.

**VIDEO**

**A SONG FOR HIS PEOPLE**  
Pedro J. González and the Fight for Mexican-American Rights

## The New Deal Brings New Opportunities

In some ways, the New Deal represented an important opportunity for minorities and women, but what these groups gained was limited. Long-standing patterns of prejudice and discrimination continued to plague them and to prevent their full and equal participation in national life.

**WOMEN MAKE THEIR MARK** One of the most notable changes during the New Deal was the naming of several women to important government positions. **Frances Perkins** became America's first female cabinet member. As secretary of labor, she played a major role in creating the Social Security system and super-

vised labor legislation. President Roosevelt, encouraged by his wife Eleanor and seeking the support of women voters, also appointed two female diplomats and a female federal judge.

However, women continued to face discrimination in the workplace from male workers who believed that working women took jobs away from men. A Gallup poll taken in 1936 reported that 82 percent of Americans said that a wife should not work if her husband had a job.

Additionally, New Deal laws yielded mixed results. The National Recovery Administration, for example, set wage codes, some of which set lower minimum wages for women. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Civil Works Administration hired far fewer women than men, and the Civilian Conservation Corps hired only men.

In spite of these barriers, women continued their movement into the workplace. Although the overall percentage of women working for wages increased only slightly during the 1930s, the percentage of married women in the workplace grew from 11.7 percent in 1930 to 15.6 percent in 1940. In short, widespread criticism of working women did not halt the long-term trend of women working outside the home.

## African-American Activism

The 1930s witnessed a growth of activism by African Americans. One notable figure was A. Philip Randolph, who organized the country's first all-black trade union, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. His work and that of others laid the groundwork for what would become the civil rights movement.

**AFRICAN AMERICANS TAKE LEADERSHIP ROLES** During the New Deal, Roosevelt appointed more than 100 African Americans to key positions in the government. **Mary McLeod Bethune**—an educator who dedicated herself to promoting opportunities for young African Americans—was one such appointee. Hired by the president to head the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration, Bethune worked to ensure that the NYA hired African-American administrators and provided job training and other benefits to minority students.

Bethune also helped organize a “Black Cabinet” of influential African Americans to advise the Roosevelt administration on racial issues. Among these figures were William H. Hastie and Robert C. Weaver, both appointees to Roosevelt’s Department of Interior. Never before had so many African Americans had a voice in the White House. 

Eleanor Roosevelt played a key role in opening doors for African Americans in government. She was also instrumental in bringing about one of the most dramatic cultural events of the

### MAIN IDEA

**Synthesizing**  
 Why was the “Black Cabinet” important to the Roosevelt administration?



 **Mary McLeod Bethune**, a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, was a strong supporter of the New Deal.

**KEY PLAYER**



**FRANCES PERKINS**  
1882–1965

As a student at Mount Holyoke College, Frances Perkins attended lectures that introduced her to social reform efforts. Her initial work in the settlement house movement sparked her interest in pursuing the emerging social service organizations. After witnessing the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911 (see Chapter 6, page 249), Perkins pledged to fight for labor reforms, especially those for women. A pioneer for labor and women’s issues, she changed her name from Fannie to Frances, believing she would be taken more seriously in her work.



▲ Marian Anderson sang from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on April 9, 1939.

## HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

### DEPORTATION OF MEXICAN AMERICANS

Many Mexican Americans were long-time residents or citizens of the United States. Others came during the 1920s to work on farms in Texas, California, and Arizona. Valued for their low-cost labor during the good times, these migrant workers became the target of hostility during the Great Depression. Many returned to Mexico willingly, while others were deported by the United States government. During the 1930s, as many as 400,000 persons of Mexican descent, many of them U.S. citizens, were deported to Mexico.

period: a performance by the African-American singer Marian Anderson in 1939. When the Daughters of the American Revolution chose not to allow Anderson to perform in their concert hall in Washington, D.C., because of her race, Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the organization. She then arranged for Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday. At the concert, Walter White, an official of the NAACP, noticed one girl in the crowd.

### A PERSONAL VOICE WALTER WHITE

“Her hands were particularly noticeable as she thrust them forward and upward, trying desperately . . . to touch the singer. They were hands which despite their youth had known only the dreary work of manual labor. Tears streamed down the girl’s dark face. Her hat was askew, but in her eyes flamed hope bordering on ecstasy. . . . If Marian Anderson could do it, the girl’s eyes seemed to say, then I can, too.”

—*A Man Called White*

**THE PRESIDENT FAILS TO SUPPORT CIVIL RIGHTS** Despite efforts to promote racial equality, Roosevelt was never committed to full civil rights for African Americans. He was afraid of upsetting white Democratic voters in the South, an important segment of his supporters. He refused to approve a federal antilynching law and an end to the poll tax, two key goals of the civil rights movement. Further, a number of New Deal agencies clearly discriminated against African Americans, including the NRA, the CCC, and the TVA. These programs gave lower wages to African Americans and favored whites.

African Americans recognized the need to fight for their rights and to improve conditions in areas that the New Deal ignored. In 1934, they helped organize the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, which sought to protect the rights of tenant farmers and sharecroppers, both white and black. In the North, the union created tenants’ groups and launched campaigns to increase job opportunities.

In general, however, African Americans supported the Roosevelt administration and the New Deal, generally seeing them as their best hope for the future. As one man recalled, “Roosevelt touched the temper of the black community. You did not look upon him as being white, black, blue or green. He was President Roosevelt.”

### MAIN IDEA

**Evaluating** B Evaluate the actions and policies of the Roosevelt administration on civil rights.

## Mexican-American Fortunes

Mexican Americans also tended to support the New Deal, even though they received even fewer benefits than African Americans did. Large numbers of Mexican Americans had come to the United States during the 1920s, settling mainly in the Southwest. Most found work laboring on farms, an occupation that was essentially unprotected by state and federal laws. During the Depression, farm wages fell to as little as nine cents an hour. Farm workers who tried to unionize

**MAIN IDEA****Identifying Problems**

**C** Why was life difficult for farm laborers during the Depression?

often met with violence from employers and government authorities. Although the CCC and WPA helped some Mexican Americans, these agencies also discriminated against them by disqualifying from their programs migrant workers who had no permanent address. **C**

## Native Americans Gain Support

Native Americans received strong government support from the New Deal. In 1924, Native Americans had received full citizenship by law. In 1933, President Roosevelt appointed **John Collier** as commissioner of Indian affairs. Collier helped create the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. This act was an extreme change in government policy. It moved away from assimilation and toward Native American autonomy. It also helped to restore some reservation lands to tribal ownership. The act mandated changes in three areas:

- *economic*—Native American lands would belong to an entire tribe. This provision strengthened Native American land claims by prohibiting the government from taking over unclaimed reservation lands and selling them to people other than Native Americans.
- *cultural*—The number of boarding schools for Native American children was reduced, and children could attend school on the reservations.
- *political*—Tribes were given permission to elect tribal councils to govern their reservations.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Summarizing**  
**D** What changes occurred for Native Americans as a result of the New Deal?

Some Native Americans who valued their tribal traditions hailed the act as an important step forward. Others who had become more “Americanized” as individual landowners under the previous Dawes Act objected, because they were tired of white people telling them what was good for them. **D**



▲ **John Collier talks with Chief Richard, one of several Native American chiefs attending the Four Nation Celebration held at Niagara Falls, New York, in September 1934.**

## FDR Creates the New Deal Coalition

Although New Deal policies had mixed results for minorities, these groups generally backed President Roosevelt. In fact, one of FDR’s great achievements was to create the **New Deal Coalition**—an alignment of diverse groups dedicated to supporting the Democratic Party. The coalition included Southern whites, various urban groups, African Americans, and unionized industrial workers. As a result, Democrats dominated national politics throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

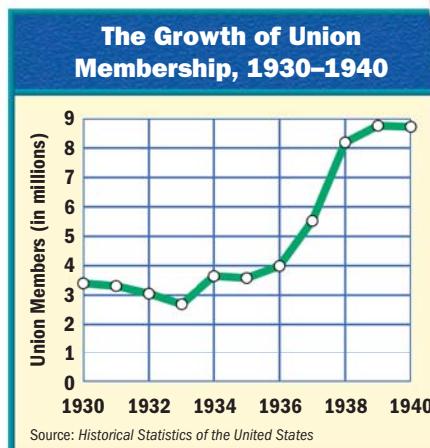
**LABOR UNIONS FLOURISH** As a result of the Wagner Act and other prolabor legislation passed during the New Deal, union members enjoyed better working conditions and increased bargaining power. In their eyes, President Roosevelt was a “friend of labor.” Labor unions donated money to Roosevelt’s reelection campaigns, and union workers pledged their votes to him.

Between 1933 and 1941, union membership grew from less than 3 million to more than 10 million. Unionization especially affected coal miners and workers in mass-production industries, such as the automobile, rubber, and electrical industries. It was in these industries, too, that a struggle for dominance within the labor movement began to develop.

## The Growing Labor Movement, 1933–1940

### Robert F. Wagner

A Democratic senator from New York (1927–1949), Robert F. Wagner was especially interested in workers' welfare. Wagner introduced the National Labor Relations Act in Congress in 1935.



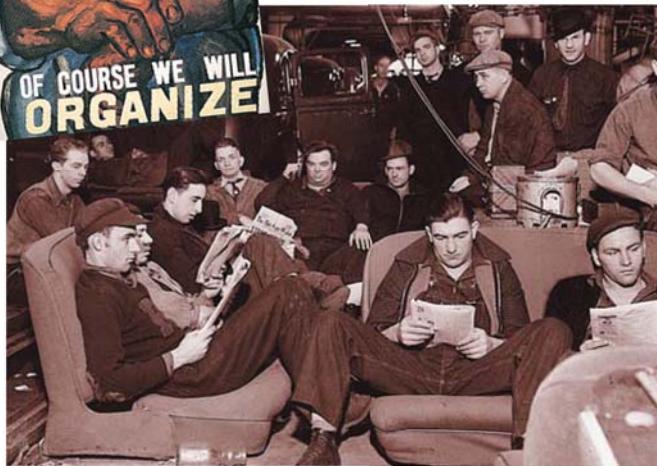
### Sit-down strikes ▶

Union workers—such as these CIO strikers at the Fisher automobile plant in Flint, Michigan, in 1937—found the sit-down strike an extremely effective method for getting their demands met.



### Union membership soars

A Ben Shahn poster from the late 1930s boasted of the rise in union membership.



The American Federation of Labor (AFL) had traditionally been restricted to the craft unions, such as carpenters and electricians. Most of the AFL leaders opposed industrywide unions that represented all the workers in a given industry, such as automobile manufacturing. **E**

Frustrated by this position, several key labor leaders, including John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers of America and David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers, formed the Committee for Industrial Organization to organize industrial unions. The committee rapidly signed up unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and within two years it succeeded in gaining union recognition in the steel and automobile industries. In 1938, the Committee for Industrial Organization was expelled from the AFL and changed its name to the **Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)**. This split lasted until 1955.

**LABOR DISPUTES** One of the main bargaining tactics of the labor movement in the 1930s was the sit-down strike. Instead of walking off their jobs, workers remained inside their plants, but they did not work. This prevented the factory owners from carrying on production with strikebreakers, or scabs. Some Americans disapproved of the sit-down strike, calling it a violation of private property. Nonetheless, it proved to be an effective bargaining tool.

Not all labor disputes in the 1930s were peaceful. Perhaps the most dramatic incident was the clash at the Republic Steel plant in Chicago on Memorial Day, 1937. Police attacked striking steelworkers outside the plant. One striker, an African-American man, recalled the experience.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Effects

- E** How did New Deal policies affect organized labor?

### Background

See *strike* on page R45 in the Economics Handbook.

### A PERSONAL VOICE JESSE REESE

“I began to see people drop. There was a Mexican on my side, and he fell; and there was a black man on my side and he fell. Down I went. I crawled around in the grass and saw that people were getting beat. I'd never seen police beat women, not white women. I'd seen them beat black women, but this was the first time in my life I'd seen them beat white women—with sticks.”

—quoted in *The Great Depression*

Ten people were killed and 84 wounded in this incident, which became known as the Memorial Day Massacre. Shortly afterward, the National Labor Relations Board stepped in and required the head of Republic Steel, Tom Girdler, to negotiate with the union. This and other actions helped labor gain strength during the 1930s.

**FDR WINS IN 1936** Urban voters were another important component of the New Deal coalition. Support for the Democratic Party surged, especially in large Northern cities, such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. These and other cities had powerful city political organizations that provided services, such as jobs, in exchange for votes. In the 1936 election, President Roosevelt carried the nation's 12 largest cities.

Support for President Roosevelt came from various religious and ethnic groups—Roman Catholics, Jews, Italians, Irish, and Polish and other Slavic peoples—as well as from African Americans. His appeal to these groups was based on New Deal labor laws and work-relief programs, which aided the urban poor. The president also made direct and persuasive appeals to urban voters at election time. To reinforce his support, he also appointed many officials of urban-immigrant backgrounds, particularly Roman Catholics and Jews, to important government positions.

Women, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and workers from all walks of life were greatly affected by the New Deal. It also had a tremendous influence on American society and culture.



▲  
Chicago police  
attack strikers  
at what would  
become known as  
the Memorial Day  
Massacre (1937).

## SECTION 3

### ASSESSMENT

#### 1. TERMS & NAMES

 For each of the following terms and names, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- |                      |                     |                         |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| •Frances Perkins     | •John Collier       | •Congress of Industrial |
| •Mary McLeod Bethune | •New Deal coalition | Organizations (CIO)     |

#### MAIN IDEA

##### 2. TAKING NOTES

Using a web diagram like the partial one shown here, note the effects of New Deal policies on American women, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, unionized workers, and urban Americans.



Write a paragraph explaining the effects of the New Deal on one of the groups.

#### CRITICAL THINKING

##### 3. SUMMARIZING

What steps did women take toward equality during the 1930s?

##### Think About:

- the role of women in government
- hiring practices in federal programs
- women's opportunities in business and industry

##### 4. EVALUATING

In your opinion, did organized labor become too powerful in the 1930s? Explain your answer. **Think About:**

- why workers joined unions
- how unions organized workers
- the role of unions in politics

##### 5. ANALYZING MOTIVES

Why did urban voters support President Roosevelt?