

Example of the great depression and the new deal term paper

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FDR – Advocate of the American People

In his seminal essay, David M Kennedy speaks about Franklin Roosevelt's politician's sensibility which he brought to the White House. According to his press secretary Theodore Joslin, Roosevelt had an incredible memory especially of localized politics and the officials who populated several far flung counties across the whole United States. Kennedy also compared Roosevelt with Hoover with the latter having a mathematician's taste for things while Roosevelt was much more the consummate politician in every way.

Kennedy's essay focuses on several important elements which revealed Roosevelt's unique personality especially the Cermak incident where the Mayor of Chicago ended up dying instead of the President-elect. Here we also observe at close quarters the humanity of Roosevelt as well as the huge problems he had to face when he assumed the Presidency. The article is also extremely detailed with regards to the statistics on unemployment and foreclosures where the country was brought practically to its knees on several counts. The statistics on farms and the agricultural sector actually make for pretty harrowing reading.

However the measure which Kennedy sees as the most important and lasting legacy of the New Deal is the Social Security Act which helped to lift millions of Americans out of poverty. Although the work programmes were positive in themselves, nothing really compared with what the Social Security Act achieved.

FDR: Architect of Ineffectual Big Government

In his essay, Burton Folsom takes the opposite view of the preceding essay and blasts Roosevelt's policies, particularly the New Deal for prolonging a period of high unemployment in the United States. In fact he comes up with statistics which show that the situation in 1939 was actually far worse than that in 1931 with unemployment actually rising not declining. Folsom is severely critical of the New Deal implying that it was simply a socialist distraction

Folsom refers to what Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau said when he described the 1930's as 'the decade of disaster'. Indeed, average unemployment for the whole year in 1939 would be higher than that in 1931, the year before Roosevelt won the election defeating Herbert Hoover. Fully 17.2 percent of Americans, or 9,480,000, remained unemployed in 1939, up from 16.3 percent, or 8,020,000 in 1931. And although 1932 was a better year than 1931, the figure of unemployment for 1939 was much worse than the first year of the decade. There was essentially a very high level of unemployment in 1939 which was actually higher than that registered in 1931. This, Folsom argues, is a vindication of his view that the New Deal was indeed a failure

Folsom seems to be critical of the school which excuses Roosevelt for his doings throughout the New Deal arguing that he was constrained to act within a very limited area of reform. He is also scathingly critical of the political populism which seemed to be a Roosevelt specialty.

President Roosevelt says government must act

“ This is pre-eminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance” (Roosevelt Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933).

This introduction to President Franklin Roosevelt’s Inaugural Address shows that the American people were indeed ready to fight the Great Depression with the classic fear of fear itself idiom remaining ringing in one’s ears.

The Great Depression was a terrible situation which was brought about by a combination of natural and man-made factors. Both John Steinbeck’s, ‘ The Grapes of Wrath’ and Dorothea Lange’s photographic series go deep into the heart of the matter demonstrating the plight of those sharecroppers who were caught in this maelstrom from which there was little escape.

Steinbeck’s story revolves around the issues which caught the poor families into the Great Depression. In the opening chapter we have a vivid description of the Dust Bowl which as the phenomenon that affected such areas as Colorado and the Deep South and which practically destroyed all available and arable farmland. Dorothea Lange fits in perfectly with this mindset and her photographs, particularly those portraying sharecroppers and their families in Louisiana are strikingly effective and harrowing at the same time.

This apt description demonstrates the extent of the damage done by nature

to the crops of the farmers who were already living below the poverty line in a good year but this tragedy destroyed them completely. Lange's photograph of the child afflicted with malnutrition and rickets is also very instructive as it demonstrates the suffering endured by children who were powerless to resist and to not be affected by the Great Depression. One can only imagine what the parents felt in such a situation when their children wasted away before their very eyes, surely it must have been harrowing and full of grief.

In the photographs from several farms which were hit hard during the depression, Lange exemplifies the plight of this particular family who are peeping out of their tent as they watch the outside world while keeping a certain dignity. This is all exemplified in Steinbeck's work as he vividly describes the humiliation migrant farm workers had to go through when they moved from one place to another in a desperate attempt to find work.

In Chapter 5 of 'The Grapes of Wrath', Steinbeck continues to expand on the situation where the owners and administrators of the fallow and stricken lands visit the farmers and threaten to evict them even though the lands went fallow through no fault of theirs.

This harrowing quote shows the desperation into which the sharecroppers had descended. They did not care anymore about their fate but were full of deeply pent up anger, hatred and resentment towards those who were making their lives hell and who did not care one jot about their families or their intrinsic fate.

Works Cited:

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933, as published in Samuel Rosenman, ed., *The Public Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Volume Two: The Year of Crisis, 1933* (New York: Random House, 1938) 11-16.