

# Historiography of great depression labor legislation assignment

[History](#)



The Great Depression of the sass, in America, contained all these elements and therefore left an indelible imprint on the minds of those who lived and struggled through it, and, in turn, on the minds of a significant number of historians who have tidied its ramifications ever since. Political historians have analyzed the government's role in the devastating events which led to the Great Depression, the myriad legislation known as the New Deal designed to relieve it, and especially the role played by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and a few of his closest advisors in framing a response to the unprecedented social upheaval caused by the economic downturn. Economic historians have studied the business conditions that prevailed at the onset of the depression, the influential work of English economist John Maynard Keynes, and the merits of the recovery. Labor historians have studied the role unions played in the Great Depression, how New Deal legislation gave rise to union organizing, the lengths and limits of union militancy, and the degree to which unions and union leaders were empowered as a result of this legislation.

With the possible exception of a few Marxist scholars who have debated the role of class consciousness in the Great Depression, however, historians have generally pushed to the sidelines of the historiographer's debate the role played by the common person who felt the effects of the Great Depression at the ground level, and thus, most cutely. The objective of this study was to examine how historiography reflected the effect the activities those displaced by the Great Depression had on lawmakers, and how their activities were understood by policy makers and filtered through the political process into legislation affecting the poor.

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The guiding assumption for this study was that the growth of industrialism outpaced intellectualism ability to keep up with it thus allowing the interests of huge industrialists to wrest control of government policy to the detriment of workers. The Great Depression allowed an opportunity for intellectuals and lawmakers sympathetic to the unemployed to catch up. Did historians depict the Great Depression in this manner? Although technically a political science professor, Irving Bernstein wrote definitively on labor during the Great Depression, and is best known for his trilogy analyzing America's efforts to deal with ITIL .

In a 1976 article, " Public Policy and the American Worker, 1933-45," Bernstein analyzed the effects of sass labor legislation. It was Bernstein thesis that after passage of the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) in 1935 it became easier Han ever before for labor to organize into unions of their choosing, and that labor Historiography of Great Depression Labor Legislation By Maxed strikes were the impetus tort this legislation .

Bernstein cited the New Deals TLS attempt to help labor through section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Although 7(a) sparked new labor organizing, its governing body, the National Labor Board (NIL) had no power of forced compliance and had to rely on political persuasion to enforce its decisions. Many employers ignored the NIL and the auto industry went so far as to persuade Roosevelt to push through a separate Automobile Labor Board which recognized company unions and virtually destroyed the NIL by 1934.

According to Bernstein, the failure of the NLR and efforts by big business to deny organizing rights to large numbers of workers sparked a series of violent strikes in 1934 that convinced lawmakers, especially Robert Wagner of New York, to push for legislation granting a governing body for labor which could conduct elections for union representation, certify unions authorized by these elections, and determine unfair labor practices by employers.

It was Bernstein's conclusion that the empowerment the Wagner Act gave to unions led to vigorous moves by the AFL and newly formed CIO to organize the unrecognized, but that the more radical CIO made more dramatic gains.

Although Bernstein gave workers credit for attempting to employ their agency in the Great Depression- his article was an early example of an American historian demonstrating worker agency to better their conditions- it still implied political action designed by the ruling class to bolster the economy was the most important element in bettering the lives of the depression's dispossessed, not the voice of the dispossessed themselves. Also offering political analysis was Roger Bills in a 1998 article that focused on the efforts of Robert Wagner in promoting the interests of labor and the unemployed.

Bills felt Wagner was the unsung hero of the New Deal. While Roosevelt publicly campaigned for social equality, it was often over his objections and with Wagner's initiative that much New Deal legislation was passed. According to Bills, Wagner supported the administration but did not merely rubber stamp its initiatives. Wagner asserted his independence on a number of occasions, but never publicly criticized the president. In Bills' opinion, it as

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Wager's more aggressive approach to labor legislation that prevailed over Roosevelt political expediency especially in passing the act which bore his name, the National Labor Relations Act.

Important to this study was Bills portrayal of Wager's background and how he came to empathic with workers and the unemployed because this analysis helped answer the question of where New Deal legislation originated, and how Wagner had a greater sense of urgency in the creation of America's limited welfare state than Roosevelt. It was not Bills intent to examine the extent to which the common person's anxiety influenced lawmakers, but y emphasizing Wager's working class upbringing Bills shed light on the impression working class appeals had on a key legislator of the New Deal long before there was a New Deal.

Another unintended interpretation of Bills' characterization of Wager's early career was that Wagner got his start with the backing of New Work's corrupt Tammany Hall which relied on support from New Work's growing immigrant population which was mostly working class. It was reasonable to assume that Tammany asked for and received support for its largest constituency in exchange for its support during Wager's early career. It was while early in his career, during the "prosperous" sass, that Wagner began crafting New Deal-like legislation, at a time when it was not politically opportune.

Despite emphasizing Wager's working class background, and Bills used the term working class, he never mentioned any connection to Marx, or indicated in any way that Wager's thought was rooted in any form of radicalism. The Great Depression provided not only Roosevelt, but Wagner as well, with the

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political opportunity to adopt measures to reduce the competitiveness of American capitalism and lessen its negative impact on the working class, but both operated within the confines of traditional American institutions.

Roosevelt, and especially Wagner, saw long before the fact that unbridled free-market capitalism was trapping large numbers of people in low wage, low security employment which was detrimental to the economy and led to severe setbacks like the Great Depression. Roosevelt's upper-class background may have blinded him to the urgency of working class conditions, but the lesson should not have been lost on Wagner. It could be concluded from the fact that in the person of Wagner, even if only indirectly, labor was given a voice, because of the Great Depression, that was carried to the halls of the U.S.

S. Senates. In 2001, Daniel Nelson, Professor of History at the University of Akron, picked up the gauntlet thrown down by Bernstein. Nelson pointed out that Bernstein associated the turbulence of the 1930s with the rise of industrial unionism and the CIO, and that Bernstein attributed the economic recovery to the long-term victory by the CIO with the mystique of CIO leader John L. Lewis, and a falsification of CIO membership records which exaggerated the effectiveness of the CIO.

Nelson argued that other forces must have been at work than those claimed by Bernstein and offered the thesis that it was business inspired regulatory legislation in the 1930s which had the greatest impact on union organization, more than labor activism practiced by the CIO. Thus, according to Nelson, the New Deal attained greater significance in the 1930s than the CIO.

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Nelson termed late sass regulatory legislation the “ other New Deal” specifically to separate it from the early New Deal legislation cited by Bernstein as responsible for the worker radicalism which Bernstein claimed led to the prominence of the CIO in the late sass.

Nelson debunked statistics claiming higher union membership in early CIO organized industries by pointing out that due to the volatile nature of employment in the early sass, many of the workers counted as belonging to unions from 1933 to 1936 actually lost their jobs after a short time while drifting between unemployment and low wage employment, and did not remain in unions very long.

Nelson claimed further that many of these same workers eventually showed up in unions that had been formed by the FALL in the late sass after regulatory legislation induced by big business had taken effect, and only then did they enjoy long-term union membership. This was important to Nelson because he claimed it showed that legislation mixed with the conservative approach of the FALL had a more lasting approach than the labor militancy attributed to the CIO.

Nelson also cited FALL accomplishments in organizing workers in large skilled sectors of the economy like the railroad industry, the airline industry, and the motor trucking industry as support for his claim that the FALL enjoyed greater success in organizing workers without the radicalism and turbulence attributed to the CHIC. Nelson’s argument opposed the idea of worker agency in the formulation of depression-era social welfare legislation.

Nelson did not go as far as Bernstein in granting workers a voice in the legislation that affected them.

And, by concentrating his study on business initiative in enacting regulatory legislation in the late 1930s rather than the early New Deal, he closed the door on Bills' unstated assumption in his argument that Wagner brought a significant voice for labor to Washington with him. Nelson exposed a shortcoming in Bernstein argument by claiming that legislation favorable to labor organizing was an unintended, or at best unavoidable, consequence of political action designed to bolster business.

However, the only way to accept Nelson's argument was to accept his implied premise that early 1930s labor radicalism had no effect on late 1930s labor organizing. Nelson did not address the question of whether or not late 1930s labor organizing was more orderly than early 1930s organizing because both labor and business wished to avoid further radicalism. The radicalism of the early and mid-1930s may possibly have resulted in the appeasement of labor in the latter half of the decade, thus making late 1930s labor organizing more peaceful yet still effected by radicalism.

Whereas Bernstein directly implied that labor unrest was at least partially responsible for the United States government enacting legislation directed at assisting the disadvantaged, it could only be indirectly implied from Nelson's argument. Carrying the political argument into different territory, feminist Ruth O'Brien argued in 2001 that the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) which established minimum wages, overtime pay, reconsidering, and youth employment standards was a missed opportunity to create stronger welfare



state that could have bolstered the marginal roles of women, minorities, and unions in the economy.

O'Brien addressed a larger question hanging over this study of how historians have addressed the case of the significant number of people pushed to the margins of society by the Great Depression. O'Brien argument revolved around the distinction between authority emanating from laws designed to provide equal treatment, and laws providing special protection. O'Brien clarified that ELSE provided for equal treatment, granting broad rights to all U. S. Workers like minimum wages and shorter work weeks, but did not give procedural power to specific groups like women or minorities to bargain for special rights under its provisions.

Neither did ELSE allow unions to police working conditions as a regulatory agency, as well as a union, beyond workers covered in bargaining agreements, thus separating workers into competing groups of interests of two basic types; those fortunate enough to be covered by a collective bargaining unit, and those facing sweatshop work conditions. Labor unions in the sass were described y O'Brien as favoring white male workers, and thus, not havens for marginal groups like women and minorities.

The lost opportunity to O'Brien was that had Democratic lawmakers chosen to grant special protection rights in ELSE, workers could have filed suits under the law and had greater agency to provoke change for specific groups of workers, not just those involved with unions. O'Brien argument drew comparison to Nelson's argument in that both acknowledged business

interests superseded those of the common citizen to produce less radical legislation than that which might otherwise have appeared.

Nelson argued that less radical late sass legislation was good for workers joining unions because of the permanency it gave to unions. O'Brien did not agree with Nelson on this point and took his argument to task regarding the important question, at whose expense? O'Brien answered this question by demonstrating that women and minorities were left to fend for themselves much less stressfully than union members because they lacked procedural power under the law to take on exploitative employers.

Part of the reason marginal workers lacked procedural power was that the residual effect of the labor and business collaboration scribed by Nelson was to undermine the militancy of the labor movement. The conclusion drawn from O'Brien work was that lack of procedural power diminished the voices of large groups of workers and allowed unscrupulous employers to exploit them in sweatshop-like conditions and fend off increasing wages for all workers in the non-union sector.

Labor unions were complicit in changing the impetus of the law in a negative direction for marginal workers at a time when they could have pushed for stronger laws, because they were willing to compromise with big business more than they had to. Legislation granting concessions to allow for greater labor organizing was a ruling class ploy to divide the working class, and had the ironic effect of organized labor supporting legislation that limited its reach.

Marginal workers not being given procedural power was accomplished because lawmakers needed to go through a series of compromises in order to pass legislation and those with the power to force compromises on lawmakers were effective in establishing legislative agencies that lacked full authority and would hinder them the least. In his 2006 monograph *A Commonwealth of Hope* Alan Lawson put forward the thesis that the Great Depression created the political opportunity for Franklin Roosevelt, and like-minded reformers, to put reforms of the American economic system into motion that they had formulated over a period of years.

New Deal policies of the Great Depression were not just a knee-jerk reaction designed for political gain. Lawson's monograph expanded Bills' profile of Wagner by including a wider range of political players bringing forth ideas on regulating free market capitalism hatched the decade before, but the main point was basically the same- that the depression provided a wide array of the American public to accept the same proposals for governmental control of the economy that they would not have permitted just a few years before.

Bills and Lawson implied business was quick to realize that the governance of the economy needed to change, and acted just as quickly to control the process of regulation to alleviate labor's short-term advantage. Bills and Lawson emphasized that the New Deal was the result of long-developed progressive thought, but did not challenge the meme that it was created within the framework of traditional American thought which was dominated by the ruling class and was reluctant to grant any agency to the working

class beyond what was minimally necessary due to the circumstances of the Great Depression.

David Kennedy pared down the first half of his 1999 Pulitzer Prize winning tome *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* in an article titled "What the New Deal Did," marking the tenth anniversary of the book's publication, by simply stating that the New Deal provided security.

To Kennedy the question of whether or not the New Deal was successful in its time, whether it incorporated the voice of the superimposed, or even if it accomplished what its creators intended was irrelevant and overshadowed by the fact that the New Deal established the long-term notion that providing economic security was the purpose and major responsibility of American government.

Kennedy addressed one of the questions of this study by claiming the New Deal was an admission that government's relation to capitalism was outlawed and that, as such, capitalism needed to be re-built according to long standing American republican values that business benefits not just the few, but the many, and does so in a way that allows for economic growth and stability. Kennedy pointed out that security was not only important to labor and those struggling to find employment, but to capital itself. Capitalistic growth could not occur as long as capital was crippled by insecurity.

Kennedy's article, like his book, was not interested in answering micro level questions concerning labor being given a voice, the extent and limit of that voice, and what impact labor's voice had on the New Deal. Instead Kennedy was concerned with macro questions that drew in a panorama of political, labor, and economic participants and the long-term effect they had on American politics. It did not disturb Kennedy that this may have been achieved through paternalistic means which allowed that those struggling most with the depression benefited only as a consequence of benefiting those who struggled least.

Kennedy also was not concerned with the contention made by O'Brien that the compromises made to gain leveraged security represented a lost opportunity to gain even stronger specific security for a greater number of the marginalia. Turning to the argument of economic historians leads to consideration of a monograph written in 1994 by Colic Gordon, *New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920-1935*. Like Bills and Lawson, Gordon claimed the sass played a large role in determining America's response to the Great Depression.

Unlike Bills and Lawson, Gordon attempted to claim business activity in the sass was paramount in establishing the type of unionization that emerged in the sass. According to Gordon, business attempts to pre-empt labor unions in the sass by forming company unions and developing their own form of welfare capitalism led directly to the success of their demands in the late sass to obtain a set of regulations friendly to their needs, as described by Nelson. Gordon's argument also dovetailed with Kennedy's article in that

each believed that economic security derived from business demands for organization.

Gordon provided another account of New Deal legislation having roots long before the Great Depression, but reduced worker agency in the formulation of policy to a reaction on the part of businesses who successfully regained control of the legislative process. Unwavering faith in capitalism led Lowell Galloway, Distinguished Professor of Economics at Ohio University, to claim that impediments thrown up against free market capitalism, especially those stemming from the high-wage doctrine that underlied the political thinking of many influential New Dealers, led to a prolegomena of unemployment during the Great Depression.

In an article published in 2009, Galloway argued that during the Great Depression an increase in money wages not accompanied by a corresponding increase in productivity led to higher costs and a decreased ability of businesses to absorb extra workers. According to Galloway, the provisions of the Wagner Act forcing employers to pay higher wages to union employees inhibited their ability to expand employment forcing displaced workers to seek non-union employment.

Displaced workers increased demand in the non-union sector and forced wages down. All of this was, according to Galloway, driven by the flawed assumption of the high wage doctrine that stated higher wages led to increased buying power, and eliminated stock of over produced goods.

Galloway used the analytical mechanism of classical economics that relied

on the assumption to all economic decisions being made by rational beings with complete market information.

This model allowed for convenient assumptions that made Galloway analysis seem grounded in logic, but it could only be assumed employers knew exactly what the size of the market was for the jobs they offered under economic conditions that gave immediacy to any increase in demand for the products they manufactured. Although Galloway argument was relevant to this study, many other arguments could be made to explain the low wages of the Great Depression than the oversupply of workers due to the high-wage doctrine.

One such argument was the one made by O'Brien that the Wagner Act was not adequately backed by subsequent legislation, most notably the Fair Labor Standards Act, to provide substantial enough regulatory unionization and legislative bodies to enforce better wages for marginal workers who were then exploited to keep wages low. Galloway argument sacrificed agency to the mechanisms of a theoretical market, then ironically placed blame for his perceived shortcomings of the high-wage doctrine on the failure of the intellectuals who supported it to base their argument on facts.

Social historians contribution to this study began with an article about women's roles during the Great Depression published in 1976 by Marxist feminist historian Jane Humphreys. She claimed that economic downturns systemic to capitalism, like the Great Depression, caused a backlash against women because men perceived their lack of employment to be caused by women exceeding the bounds of their traditional roles by entering the

workforce. The solution, then, became getting women back into the home which led to hostility and discrimination against women.

Humphreys did not present a classic Marxist breakdown of class struggle, but it was implied by her depiction of the treatment of women as a class against the type of men produced by capitalism. According to Humphreys, violence and workplace scarification were also systemic to capitalism. As already pointed out by Bernstein and O'Brien, the labor movement was hostile to women and helped encourage laws that legislated women out of the workplace.

Humphreys argument was relevant in 1976 because it came at a time when the economy was slowed by the forces of high unemployment and high inflation which resulted in huge backlogs of unsold inventory and became known as stagflation. Politicians were again at a loss to deal with the economy. These economic events made ongoing debates over the Equal Rights Amendment, which purported to give women the right to the same pay as men or comparable labor, among other provisions, center around the role of women in the workforce.

In 1976, the Equal Rights Amendment was a source of hostility against women. From Humphreys perspective the Great Depression's suppression of women had a direct parallel to the mid-sass. Elizabeth and Ken Bones-Wolf wrote an article in 1999 that brought the activities of Protestant religious clergy into the discussion of depression-era labor policy. In this micro-history the Bones-Wolfs argued that Protestantism should not be disregarded as a



positive influence on New Deal legislation despite its reputation for favoring business owners and deriding unions in the sass.

Overall, Catholicism emerged with a better image of supporting labor, especially industrial workers, in the Great Depression because of its concentration in major cities where working class immigrants turned to, and received support from, the Catholic Church, according to the Bones-Wolfs. But, James Myers, a Presbyterian minister, was industrial secretary of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) during the Great Depression and emphasized the liberal aspects of Christianity to propose a program of church outreach to the unemployed that stressed job safety over profits.

Under Myers' leadership the FCC advocated for a living wage, abolition of child labor, and the right of workers' to organize for collective bargaining. Myers supported Robert Wagner and the FCC advocated for passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act<sup>1</sup>. Michael Rosin's argument claiming Hollywood remained true to its ruling class roots throughout the depression by failing to produce a significant study of working class oppression until sass's *The Devil and Miss Jones* appeared in 2002. According to Origin, casting aside the labor movement in the sass was Hollywood's typical attitude when it came to the working class.

Rather than class struggle, Hollywood preferred to depict the romantic couple, the family melodrama, commodity addiction, and crime. *The Devil and Miss Jones* was the only exception. The plot of this movie could be summed up as working class girl transformed ruling class man. An uncaring store owner went undercover in his own store to root out lackadaisical

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employees only to get swept into the causes and concerns of a group of employees planning a strike against manipulative store managers. The store owner softened, fell in love with the titular Miss Jones, and eventually sided with the striking employees 2.

Rosin's article added an important element to the overall analysis of public attitudes toward the working class and how those images were perceived by legislative leaders and transformed into law because it depicted how the biggest image maker of the time, Hollywood, remained true to its ruling class roots by making very few movies explicitly portraying class conflict. Nowhere in this study was the argument more prevalent that social legislation was a reaction to worker unrest and an effort to defuse it than in an article written in 2003, titled "Marx in America: The New Deal", by Standard's John F. Manley. He analyzed class consciousness for its impact on New Deal legislation and defended Marxism against critic's claims that since such a large threat to capitalism as the Great Depression failed to produce the class conflict that Marx predicted; Marx had no relevance when studying American history. Manley argument was that class was central to the events of the 1930s in the United States, and the whole effect of New Deal legislation was to head off and divert the radical movement.

Manley pointed out that Marx grew to understand the staying power of fatalism, and to appreciate the differences in institutions and traditions between countries and left room in his theory that could have accepted the outcome of events of the American Great Depression. According to Manley, American workers' activism had an effect on Roosevelt thinking, the result of <https://assignbuster.com/historiography-of-great-depression-labor-legislation-assignment/>

which was the development of the welfare state, a red scare, and governmental regulation of the economy.

Given the entrenched state of American institutions and the traditions which supported them, these developments could only be seen, Manley claimed, as stemming from class unconsciousness and class conflict, but with an American twist which was best explained through Marxian principles. But as Lawson pointed out Roosevelt already developed firm ideas about progressive reform before the Great Depression, and Bills testified that Roosevelt was not very malleable to outside political suggestions. Some of the things historians regard as real, like class consciousness, are in fact only concepts that hang in the air like a mist above the real.

Class consciousness is an idea; therefore an intellectual tool that can be used to interpret what is real, but not real in itself. By claiming class consciousness and class conflict played significant roles during the Great Depression, Manley was implying that a large number of workers saw themselves not only as distinct from the ruling class, which to them caused the depression, but as their exploited victims as well. Further, they must have been conscious of their value as workers, distinct from those who had control over their economic fate, but viewed their ability to access power for their own benefit as limited.

However, the number of workers viewing themselves in this light may not have been as large or as constant as Manley implied. As Nelson pointed out, workers moved in and out of unemployment and in and out of union jobs so their outlook on where they stood on a social level could very well have

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changed with their employment status. And, as Charles Williams pointed out in his 2010 article about local activism centered on Briggs Local 212 workers in Detroit, a small cadre of radical, vocal activists could give the impression of a much more widespread movement than what actually existed.

In Williwaw's article Local 212 was described as maverick because its leaders often positioned themselves not only against management, but against their national union as well. Williwaw's description of Local 212 defied the idea of a unified direction for class consciousnesses. Thus workers remained fragmented and there could well have been no easily identifiable, firmly understood working class to be part of, and the concept of class consciousness only something applied by Marxist after the fact as an analytical device to keep their notion of Marxism relevant.

Even if the argument of class consciousness being strong during the sass was accepted, it was also equally true that it was short-lived. The act that so many workers were eager to fight on the side of capital in World War II, and the swelling patriotism that developed during the war, provided strong testament for the argument that class consciousness in America was historically weak. Just because class consciousness may not have been as strong as some Marxist wanted it to be, neither was it as weak as some conservatives wished it to be.

Evidence in this study was strong that workers gained a voice greater than ever before due to circumstances derived from the Great Depression.

However, workers during the depression were up against the most behemoth and far-reaching fatalist state up to that time and their voices mingled with

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several others who also weighed in on how best to contend with circumstances created by the Great Depression, and were often muzzled to the point of near exclusion.

Ruth O'Brien, for instance, made clear that women and minorities were pushed to the margins not only by business leaders and politicians, but by the labor movement itself. While it was true that labor unions finally gained a foothold in the sass, it was also pointed out by Galloway, Humphreys, O'Brien, Manley and even Origin that their gains were often at the expense of those who could have benefited by their support and could not find it anywhere else in society.

Bills, Lawson, and Gordon studied the roots of New Deal policy and while lauding the efforts of Roosevelt, Wagner, and a handful of others to take advantage of the opportunity the Great Depression created to instill long held progressive policies, their studies obscured the fact that these men also came to power with a taint in American capitalism and American notions to governance that limited their acceptance of "foreign" ideas of what may have helped a larger portion of American workers.

Kennedy pointed out the political success the New Deal had in eliminating insecurity in the American economy, but his analysis was solidly grounded in his faith in traditional American institutions. Thus, alternatives hostile to these notions, or that could not be compromised to conform to them were rejected and large numbers of people were left on the margins, their pleas forgotten. Still, the extent to which workers and the unemployed managed to

shift the focus of government activity to their needs and away from powerful business interests was emphasized by the works considered in this study.

Nelson aptly pointed out the limits of the first New Deal but his argument that business inspired legislation had a greater effect on workers and the economy could not be accepted without granting workers at least a little agency in determining the outcome of events. It was also clear that the needs of common people were picked up on in the historiography, and their impact felt even if it was not to the extent some historians, like social historians, feminists, and Marxist would like to have seen.

Because the historian's tools are imperfect, history remains malleable. This causes satirical events to remain subject to interpretation so that new views of the past are not always as important as the development or refinement of the means of looking at history. When analyzing a historical work the important question becomes, how does this argument improve the methods of understanding history as well as advance the argument the historian is weighing in on?

The value of historiography lies not only in the recording of historical arguments, but also in the refinement of the methodology of understanding historical arguments. What most often determines a work to be animal is that it presents a new way to interpret the past. The argument can eventually be refuted, the method, the means of conceptualization, remains. None of the works considered for this project were seminal.

However, most of them can be said to be derived from the work of Karl Marx whose seminal contribution was the angle of approach he adopted in basing his life study on the agency of average working people's historical struggle against the oppressive efforts of the ruling class to profit from their labor. The effect of Marx on this study was to place its focus on how American workers reacted during the Great Depression to the largest capitalist entity the world had ever seen, and to study the effect their actions had on the ruling class.

Drawing conclusions from the limited sample considered for this study it seemed that Marxism missed an opportunity to entrench itself in the American thought process, but as Manley implied, the set of institutions and traditions unique to America must be judged separately from most European forms of thought. Perhaps the gains of the American working class during the depression were even rarer than historians have portrayed and might have been obstructed more than they were had Marxism actually been as weak in the past as some of them claimed.

Scholarship centered on this question needs to continue. In an article contributed in 2012 to Labor History by Labor Economist Gregory World of Whittier College, "Plans to End the Great Depression from the American Public," a series of letters written by American citizens during the Great Depression were analyzed. World's thesis was that as early as 1933 governmental intervention in public welfare was taken as an