

Critical of franklin d. roosevelt and the new deal 1932-1940 by william e. leuchte...

[History](#)



Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal 1932-1940. by William E. Leuchtenburg. Harper & Row, 1963. The Great Depression created a political landscape in the United States that demanded bold action, calling forth people ready and willing to challenge the conventional establishment and allowing them to thrive. Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the prime example of how adversity creates a forging ground where dynamic individuals shape history. In his book Franklin D.

Roosevelt and the New Deal Leuchtenburg meticulously describes how Roosevelt changed America during his first two terms and cast some light on why he was the one to succeed in holding the great responsibility of steering the country through the depression without blind praise or unjustified criticism. The author, William E. Leuchtenburg, was born in the early 1920s, therefore was old enough to remember the atmosphere in which the New Deal was happening, though not from the standpoint of an adult, giving him the edge of knowing the actual feel of the era over a younger historian.

This may also account for his admiration of Roosevelt, as he often expresses in his book Roosevelt was widely popular amongst a majority of Americans at the time. He has written several books mainly centered around Roosevelt and became a distinguished professor of history at the University of North Carolina. He has also served as President of the American Historical Association. There is no doubt that he is very qualified to write a book on the subject of Roosevelt and even though he obviously is a great admirer of the President, he never shies away from pointing out Roosevelt's flaws.

Leuchtenburg begins by setting the stage that brought Roosevelt into power by describing the Great Depression and how the Hoover administration handled it, not completely negatively stating “ no president ever worked harder in the White House than Herbert Hoover. ” Here he first describes Roosevelt with a brief history and leads into how he became President, describing his energy and charisma as key factors.

It becomes evident that Leuchtenburg painstakingly presents rounded historical facts to eliminate the chances of a biased presentation and continues to do so through out the book, often leaving a quarter of a page of footnotes. The third chapter is where Roosevelt’s presidency begins. Leuchtenburg describes “ The Hundred Days” where the new president rushed to try to turn the country around with a flood of new legislation and bold acquisition of executive power.

He does a good job at pointing out how some legislation, such as the emergency banking bill, passed with little opposition and how other legislation was shaped by opposition or, in the case of the NRA, was generated to curb legislation Roosevelt didn’t favor. Successes and failures are pointed out proportionally and the reasons behind the fate of much of the Roosevelt administrations actions is often speculated on in a well informed and unbiased manner. After much about legislation and policy Leuchtenburg moves to describing those who would challenge Roosevelt and how they shaped Roosevelt’s policies.

The introduction of new conflicts here seemed to add a renewed sense of urgency to the book which, along with the extravagance and extremist views

of characters such as Hugh Long, managed to renew the pace of the reading. The book goes on to describe interest of lower classes such as laborers and migrant farmers and how Roosevelt was pulled more to the left for what is known as “ The Second Hundred Days” and of course describes the process of securing reelection.

Social Security is addressed in a surprisingly negative manner, “ In many respects, the law was an astonishingly inept and conservative piece of legislation” he goes on explaining “ by relying on regressive taxation and withdrawing vast sums to build up reserves, the act did untold economic mischief. ” This provides both a prime example of his unbiased approach to the subject and his tendency to ensure no statement goes unexplained.

This is broken up by a chapter on foreign policy and continued with Roosevelt’s struggles with the Supreme Court and an increasingly dissident congress before leading up to what would become World War 2 and concludes by outlining what Leuchtenburg believes to be the important points of the New Deal. To begin with, the book takes on a pretty heavy load, and does so in a thorough manner. This leads it into being pretty dense, it is definitely dense enough to through off anyone who is not a serious history student from reading it cover to cover.

Leuchtenburg definitely did his best to get all he could into one book, which is a good thing from a research point of view, but makes it unwieldy for a casual reader. There are times I could have done with less information, thankfully I had notes on hand while reading to supplement the book or else I would have become lost in the barrage being tossed out at the thickest

<https://assignbuster.com/criticalof-franklin-d-roosevelt-and-the-new-deal-1932-1940-by-william-e-leuchtenburg-assignment/>

sections. This is amplified by the fact the book sometimes goes quite a few degrees of separation from its core subject, or could be more accurately titled “ Roosevelt 1932-1940”.

This is evident in chapter 9, which is centered more on the politics of foreign policy, and not just in ways that had a direct effect on New Deal policies. I feel if the book were trimmed down a little more it would make it a lot more accessible, thus justifying the narrower scope. In addition, this would provide more room to hammer in the more relevant subjects with brief overviews so readers such as myself without an in-depth prior knowledge of the New Deal could better understand its intricacies without going back between chapters after these breaks in subject.

However, he does his best to make the book flow, especially by keeping it in chronological order for the most part. He mainly departs from this structure when he is explaining policies and events which are usually better explained grouped together, such as foreign policy. Assuming Leuchtenburg did not have a casual reading audience in mind when he wrote the book, its weightiness is not a major downfall. Also, Leuchtenburg does put forth a great deal of effort to provide balanced information.

He says himself that “ the New Deal left many problems unsolved and even created some perplexing new ones. ” It is common for him to follow up a list of success with a list of flaws, or vice-versa. I think he does such a good job at this because he keeps things in a historical perspective. For example, while it is easy to criticize Roosevelt’s initial shying away from government

spending or break from the gold standard now, back when there was little precedent for these actions these must have seemed much more radical.

This shows a thorough knowledge of the limitations of our government that extremist often ignore. By using an objective view his argument that Roosevelt was ultimately successful despite his downfalls is a thousand times more convincing than a biased pro-Roosevelt outlook would have been. On the other hand, this creates a calm, collected view through out the book which is not as invigorating as more sensational works and fails to incite as strong an emotional response .

While not necessarily a negative as far as historical accuracy, it takes away from the books ability to provide enjoyment making it easier to put down. Overall, I believe Leuchtenburg did a good job at explaining such a large, intricate subject without it either reading like an unending encyclopedia of events or skeletal time line, he expresses his opinion in a unobtrusive fashion that maintains historical accuracy and balance and avoids sensationalism, and even though its not flashy it does its job.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal is a very informative book that provides a convincing argument that Roosevelt and the New Deal were a positive turning point in American history. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal 1932-1940. by William E. Leuchtenburg. Harper & Row, 1963. (13)

Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal 1932-1940. by William E. Leuchtenburg. Harper & Row, 1963. (132) Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal 1932-1940. by William E. Leuchtenburg. Harper & Row, 1963. (346)