

Progressive era v. new deal assignment

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During the New Deal, many government planners and leaders drew inspiration for their policies from Progressive era reforms. New Dealers saw in the early twentieth century Progressive movement an innovative campaign to address the social and economic dislocations which were directly relevant to the crisis of the Great Depression. New Dealers also found in the Progressive movement an example of gradual reform through democratic institutions.

In addition, the Progressives had insisted upon the need for government to promote social justice, to preserve democracy, and to provide security to Americans, all principles that New Dealers homophone as well. But the New Deal was not simply a continuation of Progressivism. In several important ways, the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt set the United States on a course that diverged substantially from the vision of Progressivism.

In particular, The New Deal accepted that the United States was a pluralist nation and moved away from the overbearing program of assimilation that had characterized the Progressive era solution to national identity. And the New Dealers did not revive the imperialist ambitions that had led the United States into intervention throughout the world during the Progressive era. In the end, the differences between the New Deal and Progressivism are no less important than the similarities. At the most basic level, economic depressions inspired both the Progressive movement and the New Deal.

The severe economic dislocation that followed the Depression of 1893 called into question the prevailing belief in laissez faire government. With millions of Americans unemployed. Calls from business leaders and politicians for

Americans to patiently await the return of prosperity left many Americans frustrated. Motivated often by both a concern for the victims of the oppression as well as by fears of violent social disorder. Middle class reformers applied social planning and social science to tame the problems that beset industrial America.

When the New Dealers confronted the Great Depression, they envisioned their efforts as the culmination of a campaign to impose order on the American economy that had begun after the depression of 1893. From the perspective of New Dealers, Progressive era reforms had established important precedents for government Intervention In the economy but had not gone far enough to prevent economic uncertainty. Urged on by severe economic distress and the looming threat of social unrest, both progressives and New Dealers sought to reform American capitalism.

They shared the assumption that it was possible to reconcile social justice with capitalism. Although both the Progressives and the New Dealers tirelessly advocated economic cooperation and efforts to address the plight of the nation's neediest, neither group proposed any coercive redistribution of wealth. Indeed, they sought to reform capitalism so that it would not be replaced by radical alternatives. For the Progressives, the threat came from violent and revolutionary anarchism; for the New Dealers, from reactionary nationalist movements like those that emerged in Italy and Germany.

The defense of democratic Institutions, then, was bound up In the reform Both the Progressives and the New Dealers shared a belief in the possibility that government could promote and speed social improvement. At times of

great uncertainty and change, both Progressives and New Dealers insisted that the state could be used to achieve a measure of security and order. This confidence in the state reflected the confidence of both Progressives and New Dealers that government officials could use the tools of modern social science to discern the appropriate policies to address the nation's needs.

In other words, both the Progressives and the New Dealers looked to government bureaucracies to generate and oversee much of the most important business of government. This faith in government policy makers may seem curious to us, given the negative stereotypes of bureaucrats that are commonplace today. But both Progressives and New Dealers assumed that bureaucrats, motivated by a sense of public service and informed by their professional expertise, were far more likely to propose and implement disinterested policies that would benefit the broad public than would most elected politicians, who were beholden to special interests.

The experience of government activism during World War One bolstered the faith of New Dealers in the capacity of activist government to address problems in critical areas of the nation's economy. Even before Americans entered the war in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had secured the expansion of the regulatory power of the federal government in order to regulate the nation's financial institutions and the passage of a progressive federal income tax that taxed the wealthier at a higher level than the middle and working classes. Although significant, these measures were modest compared with those that followed during World War One.

Going to war in 1917 entailed a complete reorientation of the American economy. For the army and Navy to succeed abroad, mass production of war materials had to be centrally planned, and only the federal government could fulfill this role. The Wilson administration retreated various new agencies to manage the American war economy, including an agency that oversaw the nation's railroads, a War Industries Board that supervised all war-related production, even to the point of setting prices, and a labor board that resolved disputes between workers and employers.

The close cooperation between industry and government produced efficiency, but did not ignore the interests of workers. Taking an unprecedented position, the Wilson administration promoted adequate wages, reduced work hours, and the right of workers to form unions. For at least two decades before the United States entered World War One, a debate raged over the proper role of the federal government in regulating industry and protecting people who could not protect themselves. Controversy had also centered on the question of how much power the government should have to tax and control individuals and corporations.

The war and the problems it raised did not resolve all of these questions. But the war did substantially expand the power of the federal government and demonstrated that in times of crisis the federal government could play a decisive role. It was this lesson that encouraged the New Dealers to adopt many of the policies during Roosevelt so-called Hundred Days to use federal influence to organize, coordinate, and regulate the nation's economy. If New Deal reforms would eventually expand the federal government far beyond

anything that New Deal may nevertheless be traced to the experience with government during World War One.

For all of these similarities and continuities between Progressivism and New Deal reform, it would be a mistake to conclude that the New Deal was simply reheated Progressivism. New Deal nationalism differed fundamentally from the nationalism of the Progressive era. Progressives displayed far more enthusiasm for using the government to exert social control over public behavior. The passage of the 18th Amendment prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcohol was perhaps the most conspicuous example of this tendency. But it also included efforts to coerce immigrants into assimilating into American society.

Fearing that immigrants threatened the very basis of American democracy, many Progressives advocated strong measures to compel immigrants to speak English and adopt American values. Ethnic traditions could be tolerated as long as they represented little more than a quaint nostalgia for the former homeland, but allegiance to American institutions and values was inviolable. This coercive form of nationalism was especially powerful during World War One, when German Americans and immigrant opponents of the war were targets of extralegal violence, persecution, and deportations.

Roosevelt and the New Dealers, in contrast, envisioned a pluralist American society in which shared principles of equality before the law and a sense of civic responsibility would unite Americans. In part because the waves of massive immigration had been drastically reduced by reform of the nation's immigration laws during the 1890s, the issue of immigration was much less

charged during the sass. Even so, Roosevelt and his administration reached out to America's immigrant communities and actively promoted greater tolerance toward them.

Instead of looking upon persisting ethnic traditions as a threat to American identity, the New Dealers celebrated the nation's ethnic cultures as a source of strength and creativity. This tolerance for America's diversity found expression in the New Deal policies for Native Americans and in the New Deals responsiveness to African Americans. John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs during the New Deal, rejected the assumption that Indians' survival depended on their assimilation into white culture.

He recognized the autonomy of tribes and instituted bicameral and bilingual education at schools for Indians. There were limits to the New Dealers' commitment to pluralism; Roosevelt allowed political expediency to constrain his efforts on behalf of racial justice. Because he needed the support of southern white congressmen he dragged his feet over civil rights legislation that would have made lynching a federal crime. And during WWI Two his administration ignored the civil rights of Japanese Americans, who allegedly posed a threat to national security, and interred them in relocation camps.

But these conspicuous and regrettable lapses were exceptions to the general pattern of tolerance that the New Dealers displayed towards the nation's diversity. The New Dealers also pursued a foreign policy that differed in important ways from that of the Progressive. Motivated by faith in the superiority of American institutions and democracy, Progressive era

presidents, especially Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, had engaged in imperialistic adventures in the victory of the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution as a disaster for global democracy and organized worldwide opposition to the revolution.

Prompted by an interest in selling American goods to the Soviet Union, the New Dealers established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Led by Secretary of State Cornell Hull, Roosevelt administration also reversed the earlier policy of intervention in South America. The United States continued to support dictators, especially in Central America, because they promised to promote stability and preserve American economic interests.

But Roosevelt promoted a Good Neighbor policy that included the removal of American forces from Haiti and Nicaragua in 1934 and in a series of important pan-American conferences. When he pledged that the United States would not interfere in the internal or external affairs of any other country in the hemisphere he broke with the tradition of interventionism established by his Progressive era predecessors. In a real sense, the relationship between Roosevelt foreign policy to that of his Progressive era predecessors was characteristic of the relationship between Progressivism and the New Deal.