

Activity Introduction

Hey, there, how's it goin'? I'm (name), and I'd like to keep pulling at the same thread we've been following lately: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal.

Video 1 - Introduction

FDR's first term in office had been a huge success! The economy was improving, and Roosevelt's New Deal programs were largely responsible.

In 1936, Roosevelt was up for reelection, and his Republican challenger was Alfred M. Landon, governor of Kansas.

Excited to know how it turned out? Well, let's watch a video and find out the results of the presidential election of 1936!

Video 1

Bullied by his landslide victory in 1936, FDR continued to push for New Deal programs hoping to finally bring the Depression to an end. The large number of programs and his increasing power led to resistance from both Republicans and his supporters. Possibly because of some of his earlier actions, FDR could not stop the end of the New Deal.

One major mistake he made was trying to pack the court. Remember, FDR had grown frustrated with the Supreme Court because it had ruled some New Deal programs were unconstitutional, so he decided to try to increase the number of Justices in order to appoint people that would support his ideas, but FDR's court-packing scheme helped unite the Republicans and Southern Democrats against more New Deal reform.

Because of this setback and the progress made in reviving the economy, FDR was forced to accept the view that the Depression was being largely held in check, that the economic recovery, although not complete, was enough to justify scaling back reforms and spending. Then there were worries about inflation, which forced FDR to move forward and toward balancing the budget.

Additionally, the Federal Reserve raised interest rates to discourage borrowing for unsound investments, but these actions backfired. The economy slowed too much because of the lack of government spending. In the summer of 1937, the economic recovery was at its peak with unemployment down to 14%, about 7 million people; however, the next few months saw drops in national income and production, and approximately two-thirds of the economic gains made after 1933 had been lost by June of 1938.

As a result, New Dealers demanded a return to government spending and stimulation of the economy. In response, Congress enacted several new spending programs. In 1937, the Farm Security Administration was created and it was to provide housing and loans to tenant farmers so that they could become owners and prosper, but it had only minor success and eventually faded away. In September of 1937, the National Housing Act was passed, and by 1941, it had made 160,000 affordable homes available and helped reduce the number of slums in the cities. Then in February of 1938, the Agricultural Adjustment Act was passed, and it brought stability to the United States agriculture for years by creating the Commodity Credit Corporation. The Commodity Credit Corporation tried to moderate swings in agricultural prices, enforced quotas for crop production, lent money for construction of storage facilities, and started a food stamp program to help feed the hungry.

In June 1938, part of the New Deal's promise to work to eliminate poverty was realized when the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed. It set a minimum wage, maximum hours for working, and curbed the use of child labor. So FDR realized and believed that the powers of the President were inadequate, especially during emergencies, so he called for a reorganization of the Executive Department in 1937. Finally, in September of 1939, Congress passed the Administrative Reorganization Act, which strengthened the office of the President. But remember, Roosevelt's New Deal did not address racial segregation, because FDR did not want to hurt his political support in the South. He did not think that anti-lynching legislation or laws to eliminate the poll tax were that important. In a message to Congress in January of 1939, FDR called for a halt to additional reforms of the Second New Deal. He said it was necessary instead to support and preserve the reforms that already existed.

There are two views of the New Deal. Those in favor of the New Deal argued that it proved there was no going back to an unregulated economy. It showed that recessions could be combated with government spending and created hope for economic improvement, and it provided jobs as well as roads and dams, public buildings and parks. It did help reduce unemployment by 5 million, and it introduced programs that benefit Americans today like Social Security and food stamps, and it expanded the federal power over the economy while maintaining Democratic principles, but those who opposed the New Deal claimed that it was fundamentally wrong. It created only an illusion of progress. It helped create a recession by taking money away from investment. It never really gained the confidence of business communities. It relied heavily on deficit spending, which increased the federal debt. It did not end unemployment, and it interfered with free enterprise, by introducing socialistic experiments.

It remains an unsettled question whether the New Deal led to economic recovery. The opposing sides each tell a different story. What is clear is that the economy did not fully recover until the Second World War.

Video 1 – Recap

So, Roosevelt was reelected by a landslide! Can you believe the only two states he didn't carry were Maine and Vermont?? Even today, this is still one of the most overwhelming victories of any presidential election.

And, wow, Literary Digest couldn't have been more wrong with their prediction.

The failure of the Literary Digest poll led to the development of the much more accurate and scientific Gallup Poll, which is still used today to get a read on how people will vote.

You can watch that video again if you want to. Otherwise, let's move on.

Reading Passage Introduction

Although Roosevelt had very little trouble getting his New Deal programs passed through Congress, the Supreme Court was a whole different story.

In a number of cases, the Supreme Court ruled that some New Deal programs were unconstitutional. This did not thrill FDR.

Read the following passage and see what the Supreme Court thought of FDR's New Deal.

Reading Passage Introduction

I hinted earlier that FDR was developing a plan to deal with the uncooperative Supreme Court.

Roosevelt seriously feared for the future of the New Deal. Although his hands seemed tied, FDR wasn't going down without a fight.

Check out this reading passage to see how FDR tried to solve his problems with the court.

Video 2 - Introduction

By 1937, Roosevelt's struggles with the Supreme Court and the emergence of a severe recession had begun to hurt the New Deal.

Watch this video about the factors leading up to the end of the New Deal.

Video 2

By 1936, there had been little relief for the people suffering from the economic problems of the Great Depression. Because of this, FDR believed the 1936 election would be a test of his leadership and the New Deal. The Republicans were optimistic about winning, because the popularity of FDR and the New Deal was starting to decline. So let's start by looking at the candidates.

The Democrats chose President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to seek a second term. Fearing that his New Deal coalition of organized labor, Northern African Americans, Southerners, and urban workers was breaking up, he decided to pass a new set of laws known as the Second New Deal, which included the Works Progress Administration and Social Security. While these new laws were good for the workers, business leaders felt betrayed. The Second New Deal seemed to attack business, rather than cooperate with it. Businesses were outraged by attempts to raise their taxes, but even with the New Deal, FDR's reelection was not certain.

The ongoing problems facing FDR were high unemployment and struggling farmers. In fact, in 1936, there were still over 8 million unemployed, and farmers were still very

poor. The Republicans thought they had found someone who could appeal to more voters and challenge FDR and the New Deal, Governor Alfred Landon of Kansas. Alfred Landon supported New Deal measures for conservation and farm relief, and he promised the labor and independent unions a fair deal. He wanted to keep African Americans in the Republican Party, their original party, by speaking out against racial prejudice. He proposed replacing deficit spending with a balanced budget and opposed Social Security. He wanted to ease illness and old age with neighborliness, not government spending.

So now that we know who the candidates were, let's look at another problem found in the election of 1936, polling data and its results. In 1936, Literary Digest had conducted a poll and declared that Landon would win. Because Literary Digest had predicted the five previous elections correctly, the Republicans were very optimistic about their chances, but there were fatal flaws in the Literary Digest poll. Literary Digest mailed 10 million questionnaires to people asking about their choice for President and over 2 million were returned.

Then, in its October issue, Literary Digest announced that Landon would win handily with 57% of the votes. In fact, he only won 36% of the popular vote, so where did the popular poll go wrong? The sample was not random. The questions were sent out to telephone and automobile owners and magazine subscribers, but during the Depression, most Americans did not have telephones or cars. Those who did own cars and phones were fairly prosperous and more likely to vote Republican. Finally, the poll was done well in advance of the election and did not account for the undecided voters.

The same year, George Gallup conducted a poll and predicted FDR would win the election, and his poll was based on a random sample of 5000 people. As a

consequence, Literary Digest went out of business, and Gallup's correct predictions made his public opinion polling a critical part of elections to this day. Although the Republicans were hopeful, it was not meant to be. While Landon respected FDR and his New Deal programs, he did not like the hostility towards business or the inefficiency of the programs, but most of the attacks on FDR's policies came from the Republican campaigners, not Landon. FDR attacked Landon as a hypocrite who benefited from the New Deal while criticizing it, since Kansas drew 70% of its relief funds from the New Deal programs.

The 1936 election was a landslide victory for FDR. FDR won 60% of the votes. He won 46 of the 48 states that existed in 1936. Landon only won the Republican strongholds of Maine and Vermont. Americans either loved or hated FDR. His programs angered many, but at the same time, they provided hope to those who needed it most. His New Deal remained popular with the working class, despite its high unemployment, and with his victory he promised to do all he could to help disadvantaged citizens.

Video 2 - Recap

By the end of the 1930s, the New Deal had begun to run out of steam. The court controversy, crippling recession, and unsettling developments in Europe began to overshadow the New Deal.

However, it could be said that some of the New Deal's most significant legislation was passed in its final years, like The Social Security Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act.

They might sound familiar, because these pieces of legislation still affect us today!

You wanna watch that video another time? If not, we can keep right on truckin'.