Black Americans and the New Deal

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Both secondary and college teachers of United States history increasingly devote more classroom time to the experience of minorities in American life. This essay provides teachers material on an intriguing topic in black American history: the shift during the 1930's of black voters from the party of Lincoln to that of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This upheaval in black voting patterns, combined with the great migration of southern rural blacks to cities and the civil rights activities of the last two decades, has had a profound effect on recent American history. Making the Afro-American switch to the Democrats an especially interesting teaching theme is the paradox of its occurrence during a presidential administration that passed no civil rights legislation and allowed discrimination in its relief and recovery programs. In treating this subject teachers might concentrate on black attitudes toward the Hoover Administration, black expectations of the New Deal, the economic, political and social benefits blacks received from Roosevelt's administration, and the role of the black leadership, press, and organizations. The following historical material, the newspapers

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cited, and the suggested secondary books should prove helpful for lectures, background material for discussion, or for student reports.

Beginning even before Roosevelt’s election and continuing through the initiation of his second term, there operated a complex of factors which alienated the Afro-American from his traditional voting patterns and impelled him into the Democratic party. One of the more important causes for this change of allegiance was alienation of the black voter by Hoover and the Republicans. With unerring steps toward certain destruction of black good will Hoover provided issue after issue to the pro-Roosevelt black press from 1930 on. In that year Hoover named Judge John J. Parker of North Carolina to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court. Judge Parker had previously made an unfortunate comment to the effect that the blacks had been enfranchised too early. Thus the appointment of Parker was made a cause celebre by the NAACP and black press; their campaign was so effective that Parker’s appointment was blocked and, ultimately, all of the Senators who voted for Parker’s confirmation were defeated.¹

Hoover did other things to put off the black voter. Black Gold Star Mothers were sent on a separate ship to visit their son’s graves in Europe; the black Tenth Cavalry was disbanded and its members dispersed to menial jobs; and the 1932 Haitian Investigation Commission was segregated aboard the ship which took them there.² Perhaps the worst planned and most poorly executed political spectacle of the Hoover campaign of 1932 was the visit of one hundred black leaders to the President. Hoover greeted them outside the White House. After exchanging pleasantries, Perry W. Howard, Republican National Committeeman for Mississippi, delivered a speech, basically a request for an autographed picture of Hoover and an assurance from the President that “Lincoln still lives.” After the speech Hoover posed with “The One Hundred,” the first black group he had been photographed with since his ascendency to the Presidency. Black newspapers ridiculed this scene as Uncle Tomism of the worst kind.³

The catalog of black grievances against Hoover included the President’s failure to give their people a proportionate share of available government jobs. Only as the election loomed closer did he bring pressure on the Boulder Dam private construction companies to hire blacks; these contractors hired only a handful, then promptly fired them following the election.⁴ The bitterness blacks felt toward Hoover was shown in a 1932 newspaper cartoon in which the President, after one of his many outdoor trips, is depicted having his picture taken with a fish but, said the caption, never with a black group.⁵ Another attempt at humor was the caption beneath a picture of an appleseller,
symbol of the Depression, outside a Hoover Club where blacks were looking into the window: "Eve made the apple famous—Hoover made it necessary."6

The real complaints, however, focused on the place of the Afro-American in the Republican party. Throughout his tenure Hoover charted a course for his party which alienated many black voters. It seemed painfully apparent to the blacks that Hoover had decided to build a "lily-white" party in the South; even lip service to the Southern black Republican was abandoned. One token effort was made, however, to cater to the black vote, when in June 1932, just a week before the Republican convention, Hoover dashed out to Howard University to deliver a three-minute speech. Also, he allowed his nomination before the convention to be seconded by Roscoe Conkling Simmons, a black orator. Simmons and Oscar DePriest, Chicago's black Republican representative in Congress, were almost the only prominent blacks to support Hoover. Even a black newspaper that had never lost faith in the Republican party commented that Hoover "has given us absolutely nothing to enthuse over during the entire near-four years of his incumbency of office as chief executive of this great nation."7 William DuBois, then editor of Crisis, said, "The indictment which Americans of Negro descent have against Herbert Hoover is long, and to my mind, unanswerable."8 By 1936 it could safely be predicted that "Lincoln, flag-waving and mammy stories have lost their power to charm votes into ballot boxes."9

As Hoover and the Republicans estranged black voters, the hope of blacks for a better life was kindled by the coming New Deal. But how were those who had been put aside at the political feeding trough for so long to know even what to ask for? How was the black to know what was possible in government jobs for his leaders, in federal aid in relief and recovery for himself, and in opportunities for his race in industry and organized labor unions? The answer is that his expectations unfolded along with the New Deal. Some indication of this evolution can be found in a brief survey of what he expected in black positions in government.

Jobs that blacks had held under the administrations of the previous eleven years provided the only guide to what he wanted for his leadership under the New Deal. Some of these traditional positions were Conciliator in the Department of Labor, Minister to Liberia, Collector of Customs in Chicago, Register of the Treasury and of Wills in Washington, Deputy Collector of Customs of Philadelphia, a Municipal Judgeship in the District of Columbia, and a Veterans’ Hospital Administrator.10 E. K. Jones, who later was to have a promi-
nent place in the New Deal, but who spoke as a Bishop of the powerful A.M.E. Zion Church, demanded that blacks be appointed to consular and diplomatic posts; Mrs. S. Joe Brown, Chairman of Iowa Republican Women, demanded that Roosevelt "appoint Negroes to places of responsibility." The Afro-American had little idea of the jobs he was to get, but if he was vague in his expectations he knew one thing: Roosevelt had already, as Governor of New York, signed a bill enabling black lawyers to be elected to the judiciary and two judges were then serving in Harlem—this alone provided hope.

Although appointment of blacks to high places would stimulate racial pride, it would not put groceries on the common man's table. Singling out individual members of the race for reward was considered necessary, but the ordinary person was hardest hit by the Depression. And the black pocketbook in 1932 was as bankrupt as the politician's promises. As an unskilled worker the black was last hired and first fired. What he wanted as the Depression wore on was a job. One "flicker of hope" the Negro held was that he would be included in the New Deal attempt to create jobs for those out of work.

Yet here vistas were beyond what could be provided. Despite many warnings to the contrary, the black fully expected equal opportunity to work at equal wages. In a 1936 editorial in the Crisis Roy Wilkins condemned Republicans for advocating protection of Negro economic status. If there is anything the Negro should not want, he argued, it was protected status; a more honorable goal was to be considered equally for work. Nevertheless, the anticipation of equal federal employment of blacks persisted despite National Recovery Administration code-writing in the early New Deal which plainly indicated a different wage scale for black workers. It was one thing, blacks found, to be included in government job programs; it was quite another to get full rights afterwards. What the average black could expect in the way of direct governmental action is illustrated by incidents in the Midwest. In South Bend, blacks who voted for Democrat Chester B. Montgomery for Mayor in 1925 saw good things happen for the race; for example, forty blacks were immediately given employment in the street department and a "colored mechanic was appointed by the police department who today [1932] holds the position of chief mechanic in that department." (The author of this story opined that these were some of the reasons why 80 percent of St. Joseph County blacks supported the Democratic party.) In Chicago Joseph P. Gary, Democratic Civil Service Commissioner for the city, after taking credit for the appointment of 156 of the six hundred blacks holding office in that city, stated, "If our friends rally to our support in this campaign
so that we may be permitted to administer state and county offices, the Democratic party will be able to take more Negroes out of the bread lines and give them work commensurate with the qualifications to do.”\textsuperscript{15} The message was clear for all who could read. Still, these jobs were in menial categories.

So long had blacks been excluded from organized labor that their aspirations here were very limited. As the Depression worsened, unions sought the few jobs blacks held; the non-union blacks often lost. Early in the New Deal white American Federation of Labor members tried to force thirty veteran black waiters out of their jobs in the restaurant of the House of Representatives. The union’s president used the argument that his white unionists were Democrats, and since Democrats were in control of the House, such action could be taken easily. Then just to make his case stronger he added, “It is a well known fact . . . that most of the colored people are Republicans.”\textsuperscript{16} Gradually, through the enlightened policy of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union and the formation of the new Congress of Industrial Organizations, blacks slowly came to realize that union membership for them was necessary.\textsuperscript{17}

With this brief survey of what the Afro-American expected in his hope for a better life it can properly be asked, what did he get? Although the average black’s aspirations were limited, underlying his optimism was the feeling that the race was on the threshold of something new that could permanently disrupt the old allocation of wealth. The Forgotten Man’s New Deal—this could accomplish more than the black’s most fantastic dreams!\textsuperscript{18}

The programs fashioned by the Roosevelt administration were in a large measure directed to helping the lower third of the population—those who were poorly housed, poorly clothed, and poorly fed—and the Negro was more than proportionately represented among these groups. While many Negroes did not benefit from some of the New Deal measures, and while a considerable number were actually injured by others, on balance the major recovery and reform measures proved a boon to them.\textsuperscript{19}

In actuality the black benefited from the New Deal in greater measure than he had expected. At no place was this more true than at the highest level of government where a few token appointments had been made in the past. Soon after the New Deal was launched, Postmaster General Farley invited to Washington a group which was soon dubbed the “Black Brains Trust” to confer with him on appointments. The result eventually was an impressive list of high-ranking
black appointments in the Department of the Interior, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Federal Housing Administration, and other government agencies, and included people such as William H. Hastie, Dean of the Howard Law School, poet and teacher Frank S. Horne, Harvard-educated Robert C. Weaver, and educators Mary McCleod Bethune and Dr. Mordecai Johnson. Altogether, from 1933 to 1936 thirty-two blacks were appointed to administrative, executive, and technical positions with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) of Interior alone, compared with seven blacks in such positions in the whole of the government in the preceding twelve years. Yet this was not all. The Interior Department also employed 946 blacks in skilled and clerical work and 2,576 in maintenance and unskilled jobs. Thus, in the myriad of Washington agencies and in various programs in the hustings the Democrats remembered "the forgotten colored man."

Blacks also benefited directly from many New Deal programs. The Civilian Conservation Corps was the program which, because it provided a change of environment, good food, and fresh air, the Negro himself most lauded; between 1933 and 1942, 200,000 black youths worked in the CCC; a boy's literacy level was raised, he learned valuable skills, and most of all he was kept off the streets—a large job in itself. Blacks were also quick to see how they were benefited by Social Security, particularly its provisions for unemployment, aid to dependent mothers and children, assistance to the blind, and care of crippled children. A black editorial commended this bill with the words, "The Roosevelt Administration will best be remembered for its passage last week of the Social Security law. . . . it is not without significance that this great forward step has been under a Democratic administration." The New Deal's low-rent housing project was really a bright spot in the many programs beneficial to blacks. John P. Murchison, Assistant Advisor on the Economic Status of Negroes in the Department of the Interior, estimated that 30 percent of the appropriation for these housing projects would be devoted to blacks. This program put the Negro to work constructing row houses planned to take only 25 percent of the occupant's income and to cover no more than 30 percent of the project area, thus allowing plenty of green space. FERA, as an omnibus program, touched many blacks in different areas: FERA student aid, from which the National Youth Administration emerged, helped 20 percent of all students at black West Virginia State College with jobs in the spring of 1935 and gave $56,000 to aid black graduate students just before the election of 1936; altogether black schools and colleges received $281,000 in scholarships
from FERA. Three hundred black scholars were employed by FERA to gather information from former slaves, a "make work" project of incalculable value to future historians. FERA also concerned itself with "stranded populations," the displaced, and those who were on the road searching for transient work. To help rural Alabama, 40 percent populated by poor black farmers, FERA in 1934 took 6000 sharecropper families, loaned them eight months' relief in one lump sum, and then built each family a four-room house for under $300 per farmer; in 1935 it did the same for 14,000 more. Local political organizations got their share of national program allocations: blacks in Pittsburgh were appointed real estate appraisers and title searchers for the local branch of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation, specific building projects were allocated for blacks, and Roosevelt was always willing to dedicate these sites. (In a Howard University speech honoring a new Works Progress Administration-built science building, FDR drew attention to the three other WPA buildings which already stood on the campus, saying there are "no forgotten men and no forgotten races." )

Two programs that involved thousands of blacks and immeasurably advanced black status were the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the National Recovery Administration (NRA). It is difficult to imagine that by 1939 the WPA provided basic earnings for one million black families, or approximately one-seventh of the nation's black population. NRA served to weaken the wage differential based on color, and from the outset every effort was made to employ non-whites equitably in Public Works Administration construction. When NRA was found unconstitutional, a front-page editorial told black readers that "NRA had something to do with sweat shops, child labor, low wages, and long hours" and that "The NRA will come back because the people want its benefits." In the realm of jobs—comparing what the black expected with what he received—one could easily believe that America was entering a new social order.

Now that it is an established fact, known to every informed person, that the lot of the average Negro worker, whether unemployed or working, is far superior to what it was two years ago this time, whence have the critics flown? How do these gentlemen now explain how the Negro's lot can be getting worse while that of the working class in general is getting better?

By 1936 blacks had to admit that the Roosevelt administration had made the greatest effort since Reconstruction to elevate their economic and cultural status.

Yet neither the protest vote against Hoover nor the expectation
and realization of a bettered economic status wholly explain the relationship between black voters and the New Deal. Pro-Roosevelt political and religious leaders, the black press, and organizations such as the NAACP and Urban League, along with Roosevelt’s charisma among blacks also helped place the Afro-American firmly in the Democratic party.

Black author James Weldon Johnson has said that there were three leadership factors in the black community in 1934: church, press, and organizations.33 To this list, unless Johnson felt that political affiliation belonged under the general rubric “organizations,” should be added black political leaders, for in the period under consideration they often existed apart from other leadership groups. Any consideration of black leadership must take into account this dilemma, the desire to be integrated completely into the American community and to use segregated methods to attain that end.

The earliest and best example of this predicament is the black clergy, for when shut out of the white man’s church, he founded his own; when denied a profession in which to rise freely, he formed his own, the ministry of his church. Although some black ministers set themselves up in business (Father Divine), most were elevated from the black population and had the respect of their community. It was undoubtedly to Roosevelt’s advantage to have powerful church leaders endorse his candidacies in 1932 and 1936. The Reverend Reverdy C. Ransom, Bishop of the Third Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Adam Clayton Powell of the Harlem Abyssinian Baptist Church, the Right Reverend E. Thomas Demby of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and Dr. R. R. Wright, Jr., President of church-supported Wilberforce University all backed Roosevelt early and long. Thousands of black pastors at the community level provided black voters with halls for education and then from the pulpit participated in that education. The black community began to stir as its clergymen made each individual aware of the importance of his vote. In 1936 Bishop W. J. Walls, one of the most powerful figures of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, former member of the GOP, declared for Roosevelt, saying, “The black man’s politics should be for the man and measure which give him the best chance to prosper and attain his rights. . . . Roosevelt has kept the faith and deserves my support.”34

The black press was an indisputable leadership factor in changing voting habits. “There can be no question . . . of the enormous importance of the Negro press in forming Negro opinion.”35 The press was influential because it promoted racial pride and racial solidarity.36
Robert S. Abbott, founder of the Chicago Defender, was probably that city’s first Afro-American millionaire, and the black community scrutinized his life and clung to his words; this made Abbott’s support of Al Smith in 1928 and his rejection of Hoover in 1932 (although he did not openly back Roosevelt either) significant. Smith’s candidacy was actively advocated by the Baltimore Afro-American, Norfolk Journal and Guide, and Boston Guardian, mostly because of the alleged Republican attempt to resurrect a “lily-white” Republican party in the South. But it was in 1932 that the fighting editor of the Pittsburgh Courier began his appeal for Roosevelt and a New Deal. The Courier and the New York Age, leading black weeklies in the East, were the outstanding advocates of Roosevelt’s candidacy and election. Robert Vann of the Courier delivered speeches and votes. His “Patriotism and Partisanism” speech for the 1932 election, delivered, reprinted, and widely disseminated, carried the message directly—it was “time to turn the picture of Abraham Lincoln to the wall.” Vann’s taunting editorial, “There Stood the One Hundred,” already referred to, was a masterpiece in pinning the label of “Tomism” on the black leaders who had visited Hoover. Vann did not merely speak and write; he created a state organization, the United Roosevelt Club, and staffed it with his own feature and editorial writers. Vann’s drive was not entirely successful until 1936, when he delivered Pennsylvania blacks overwhelmingly to Roosevelt.

Not all the black press supported Roosevelt. The tiny Cleveland Gazette opposed the policy of the “Big Four” (Pittsburgh Courier, Baltimore Afro-American, New York Age, and Chicago Defender) and called Vann a turncoat who supported Coolidge and Hoover. Over and over the Gazette printed the story of how Roosevelt wrote the Haitian Constitution which put the black man there in bondage. The opposition’s other general theme was Southern domination of the Democratic party and fear of the “cracker” John Nance Garner. Ohio blacks remained Republican in 1932, and their later shift was never as sweeping as that of blacks in other parts of the country.

National black organizations in the 1930’s consisted primarily of the NAACP and the Urban League. Both were building a reservoir of good will by championing individual blacks in cases of discrimination. The NAACP published, beginning in 1910 under the editorship of W.E.B. DuBois (later Langston Hughes), a monthly magazine of small circulation, the Crisis. The tenacity of this publication in the wake of the severe financial stress of the Depression is to its credit. Except for the fact that DuBois was idolized, the magazine might have folded. Later under Hughes it achieved a more sprightly style, increased
circulation, and greater influence. The Urban League in 1923 began publication of the quarterly *Opportunity*. Both of these organizations devoted their major efforts to civil rights, including voting privileges, and in 1936 Colonel J. E. Spingarn, president of the NAACP and life-long Republican, endorsed Roosevelt. Generally, however, the two organizations advised a selective or "split" vote to achieve black goals, rather than recommending a specific party.

The fourth category of black leadership, the purely political, was a strange breed. First, black voters, according to Samuel Lubell, lagged one election behind. "The 1932 election showed less of a defection among Negroes than among other groups of Republican voters. In both Chicago and Cleveland nearly a third of all Negro males were jobless, yet Hoover drew more than three-fourths of the vote in the heaviest Negro wards."41 Second, the black voter was noted for his intense party loyalty, hence he was hard to shake from his traditional Republicanism. Third, the few leaders that existed were largely controlled by the Republican or Democratic machines which spawned them, precluding the exercise of political independence and leadership. However, Harold Gosnell, in his study of black politics in Chicago, gave some reasons for the eventual shift of black political leaders when he quoted "B," a black Democrat originally from Texas:

We must face conditions here [in the North] and not let the southern situation get the best of us.... We in the northern states will have to stop knocking the Democratic party and get in it and help elect senators and governors. These senators will protect our people in the south. We can put forth some effort on the senators from the inside which we can't from the outside.42

In addition to these factors there remains another element that figured heavily in the switch of black voters. The small gestures, words, attentions, considerations, expressions of concern, and humanitarian acts of Roosevelt, his wife, and official family, very real to the black community, were vividly detailed by the black press.43 It seemed evident to blacks that the "Roosevelt New Deal inaugurated an unprecedented era of interracial amity."44 Yet, there is nothing concrete to indicate that Roosevelt was even a mild crusader for black rights. Primarily, in all his public acts he merely treated the black as an American.

During the campaign of 1932 Roosevelt provided a contrast to his opponent (who actually was busy with the Depression) by reviewing the crack 369th New York Infantry Regiment of black troops. Blacks were aware that Hoover did not attend such events. When Roosevelt
visited Forbes Field in Pittsburgh to speak to a political rally, the black community let him know that they welcomed him; they provided a band which marched to a place where "the Governor" could not miss seeing them, then played "The Star Spangled Banner" for which everyone had to stand. The fact that blacks were welcomed at a white rally was an important departure from previous practice.\textsuperscript{45} Time and again after Roosevelt entered the White House, black fraternal groups visited his office. When he traveled he made certain that he visited \textit{all} of a city, as when he visited Nashville in 1934 and his motorcade made a swing through the Fisk University campus to the cheers of its black students.

Roosevelt’s personal contacts with blacks were few but well-known to the black community. Irvin H. McDuffie, his valet, was a celebrity of sorts who gave statements to the press regarding Roosevelt’s disposition and habits. On at least one occasion McDuffie interceded with Roosevelt on behalf of a murderer who was going to be executed and Roosevelt ordered a stay of execution. An incident that received sympathetic publicity was Roosevelt’s visit to the home of ailing Eddie Savoy, seventy-eight-year-old black State Department doorkeeper who had recently retired after sixty-two years of government service.\textsuperscript{46}

Roosevelt’s well-known thirst for entertainment brought black performers to the White House. Very carefully avoided was the darkie-chorus-out-on-the-plantation-lawn type of program, but the Roosevelts were entertained by a whole gamut of black entertainers. Roosevelt’s valet McDuffie was said to have been responsible for scheduling singers Lillian Evanti and Etta Moten. Bill “Bojangles” Robinson was invited a second time when he was unable to perform at the first invitation. The Morehouse College Quartet sang for the President at Warm Springs before the inauguration and soon after he entered the White House was asked to sing there. These gestures were reported faithfully by the black press.\textsuperscript{47}

In this electronic age it is difficult to imagine the following incident, illustrative of Roosevelt’s humanity. One Sylvester Harris, threatened with foreclosure of the mortgage on his farm, called the White House and was connected with the President’s office. Roosevelt, overhearing the incoming call, personally talked to Harris and promised help (eventually given by the Federal Farm Land Bank). Later, celebrity Sylvester Harris was taken North to campaign in Chicago for black Democrat Arthur W. Mitchell against black Republican Oscar De Priest. Improbable as the incident may seem, it made an important difference to a race that had never had sympathetic national
attention before.48

Examples of Roosevelt's gestures toward blacks abound. He sent numerous messages to meetings of black groups, royally entertained the President of Haiti at the White House during a 1934 visit, and personally ordered an end to segregation in a California veterans' hospital. In 1934 he made a vacation trip to the republics of color, the Virgin Islands, Haiti, and Hawaii, during which he announced withdrawal of U. S. troops from Haiti. In his office he welcomed the Negro Elks fraternal organization heads and allowed a picture to be taken. Is it any wonder that black editors could say, "Franklin Delano Roosevelt is America's second emancipator," and "This is a real New Deal. It is a modern miracle wrought by a Democratic Administration backed by the soul and mind of America."49

In at least two major areas the Roosevelt "miracle" could not be achieved: the President's relations with Southerners and his reaction to the anti-lynching legislation proposed in Congress in the 1930's. His action in reference to these areas was merely public recognition of his private dilemma. "He could not hold indefinitely the support of Southern leaders and yet seek to remake the South."50 Hence his course in relations with the South and Southerners in Congress was one of caution. Further, blacks found that in dealing with Congress on matters that were firmly within Congress' purview Roosevelt did not interfere. Nowhere was this more true than in regard to anti-lynching legislation brought up in every session from 1934 to 1938. A speech early in the administration gave hope to at least one black.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt may not have sent a message to Congress in regards to lynching, but he did speak over the radio and the world heard him say "... We don't excuse those in high places or in low places who condone lynch law." When did Mssrs. Taft, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover or Senator Borah ever say as much?51

Roosevelt was the central spirit, the invisible hand, that held out a "hidden message of hope to the Negroes of America."52 Members of his immediate and official families were also responsible for this message, one of the prime carriers being Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, unstinting in her devotion to the cause of black people. In word and deed she made this affection known. There was a well-known personal friendship with Mary McLeod Bethune, president of the National Council of Negro Women and director of Negro Affairs for the NYA. In 1936 when Mrs. Roosevelt was pictured with black ROTC cadets, the picture was circulated by the thousands by Southerners who sought to embarrass her and by the black community out of pride. When asked
by the press about the picture, she replied that she had no objection to its being taken or circulated. At a District of Columbia NAACP membership drive she made clear what her goal was: “What all of us need to do is to work for equality of recognition for work which is rendered and equality of opportunity regardless of race, color, or creed.”

Roosevelt’s official family as well carried the message, particularly the five Cabinet members who were publicly commended by the black press for appointments of blacks to their departments: Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of Commerce Daniel C. Roper, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, Postmaster General James A. Farley, and Attorney General Homer S. Cummings.

Ickes, former president of a Chicago NAACP branch, worked constantly against discrimination in giving out U. S. public works jobs, initially citing section 206 (4) of the National Industrial Recovery Act, which gave preference to veterans and residents of the area. He was a tireless speaker at project dedications and elsewhere. In an address before the 1935 NAACP convention in Baltimore, which was broadcast coast-to-coast on NBC, he made a strong speech emphasizing that the “Roosevelt revolution” was attempting to build a “new social order” of the “greatest good for the greatest number.” In another hard-hitting speech he compared Roosevelt to Lincoln. Constantly in demand for speeches before black rallies, Ickes, said black leaders, was “the one man in the administration who had real standing with them.”

Farley was well-known as a New Yorker who had worked with black people before the New Deal. During campaigns he never feared having his picture taken with local black leaders whenever settling political matters. When the Eastern Air Transport Company refused to seat a black on one of their planes which also carried U. S. mail, Farley cut the airmail subsidy from the line. The black was Andy Anderson of the Associated Negro Press and Farley’s action was disseminated far and wide.

Such instances are plenteous, and an editorial sums up the feeling:

The couple in the White House is setting an example in tolerance, sympathetic understanding and lack of color bias which all white America should follow for the sake of its soul, the preservation of our common civilization and the furtherance of social justice.

Blacks had heard promises before. The surprise of the New Deal was evident sincerity. The “idea” of equality was reflected in the Roosevelts and in their official family.
In summary, then, the major reasons blacks abandoned the Republicans and voted for Roosevelt and the New Deal were the alienation by Hoover and the Republicans, the hope for a better life through employment to which the New Deal catered, the pro-Roosevelt black leadership, and the tremendous charisma of Roosevelt among blacks.

A paradox, the details of which are beyond the scope of this paper, is why the black vote remained so solidly behind Roosevelt and the Democrats once the switch had been made. For in a short time blacks realized that their expectations and hopes, so heightened by the New Deal, were not being achieved; tentatively, slowly, they began to criticize the man and program they had come to believe would lead them to the promised land. Teachers and students will find information in the newspapers and books cited that detail the black leadership’s concern over inadequate appointments of blacks to government posts, discrimination against blacks in the administration of many New Deal relief and reform laws and agencies, especially in the South, and Roosevelt’s failure to fight for anti-lynching legislation.

Yet despite these criticisms and the repeated failure of the New Deal to produce all that was expected, the black vote remained in the Democratic column, where it is today. There have been many speculations as to why the black vote swung to Roosevelt and stayed there. The editor of the Pittsburgh Courier noted that blacks who voted for Roosevelt in 1932 were young, between twenty-one and thirty-five, and the liberal tenor of the Democratic party attracted youth. Turner Catledge, in an article reprinted from the New York Times, cited gratitude, recognition of blacks, city machine recruitment, and the black press’ attempt to dissipate the Lincoln myth. Samuel Lubell has provided structure to all the evident solutions to the paradox. Economically the New Deal placed a floor under the black worker’s wage and raised the economic bargaining power of the whole race. The New Deal was first in the large number and quality of black appointees, in part creating a new black leadership and definitely giving black youth a sense of identification with the Democrats. Mrs. Roosevelt’s basic humanitarianism was another factor. The new political coalition, in which the black could not be given full rights, cemented him into its structure by giving him a stake in government programs, attaching him to city machines, and including him in the new labor unions. Finally, says Lubell, there was a lingering emotional attachment to Roosevelt.

No reflective black thought the New Deal could change racial attitudes overnight. "President Roosevelt cannot wave a wand and
change the hearts and prejudice of white Mississippi and the rest of the South."\(^{60}\) And again, "The economic condition of the Negro workers has not improved on a par with that of the white workers, but then only those blind to reality expected that."\(^{61}\)

In an "Open Letter to the President" Robert Vann of the Pittsburgh *Courier* gave a philosophy to the blacks:

The colored people of this country voted for you not so much to punish the Republican party for its neglect and exploitation of them, as for the purpose of giving your party an opportunity to translate the principles of Jefferson into action. They expected you to make Jefferson democracy articulate.\(^{62}\)

Harold Ickes, one of the cornerstones of black faith in the New Deal, had perhaps the last word in a speech he presented to the twentieth anniversary of the Union League in Chicago when, after reiterating the theme, "There has been a New Deal in American life for the Negro," he finished by commenting on the "bond of sympathy between the two races."\(^{63}\) Between the Afro-American and the New Deal a bond had been forged, the effects of which are felt yet today.

For teachers wishing to treat this theme and utilize some of the above material, the following brief select list of books and articles should prove helpful.

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   Workers and the New Unions (Chapel Hill, 1939). Clayton and Mitchell argue that
   the lack of black organization was a major obstacle to full integration into the labor
   movement.
18 Hazel W. Harrison, "The Status of the American Negro in the New Deal," Crisis,
   40 (November 1933), 256, 262.
19 Eli Ginzberg and Alfred S. Eichner, The Troublesome Presence: American Demo-
   cracy and the Negro (Chicago, 1964), 300.
   (New York, 1947), 516-17; Pittsburgh Courier, October 17, 1936, I:2. Civil Service Com-
   mission figures show an increase of 32,000 black Federal workers in the District of
   Columbia between June 30, 1933, and June 30, 1938. Lawrence J. W. Hayes, "The Negro
   Federal Government Worker," Howard University Studies in the Social Sciences
   (Washington, 1941), III:1, p. 73.
21 I. Willis Cole, editor, Louisville Leader, quoted in Pittsburgh Courier, March 4,
   1933, II:2-3.
23 Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 525.
25 Crisis, 42 (July 1935), 107.
26 Pittsburgh Courier, October 27, 1934, I:3.
27 Ibid., August 19, 1933, I:1.
28 Ibid., October 29, 1936, I:1.
29 Ginzberg and Eichner, Troublesome Presence, 297.
I:10. 
Ibid., January 11, 1936, I:10. 
33 James Weldon Johnson, Negro Americans, What Now? (New York, 1934), 19–40. James Q. Wilson, in his study of Chicago, Negro Politics: The Search for Leadership (Glencoe, Ill., 1960), divides black leadership by function—the prestige leader, the token leader, the organizer. He excludes the politician from these categories. E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States (New York, 1957), 547, also divides the leadership functionally: religious, social welfare, political, labor, and intellectual. 
34 Pittsburgh Courier, October 3, 1936, I:1. 
38 Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 527. 
39 Pittsburgh Courier, September 17, 1932, I:1. 
40 Cleveland Gazette, September 17, 1932, p. 1. 
43 Crisis, 43 (December 1936), 369. 
44 Pittsburgh Courier, July 8, 1933, I:10. 
46 Ibid., January 7, 1933, I:3; ibid., January 6, 1934, I:1; ibid., March, 18, 1933, I:2. 
47 Ibid., February 24, 1934, I:2; Ibid., May 27, 1933, I:2. 
48 Ibid., May 10, 1934, I:1; ibid., November 17, 1934, I:3; "Roosevelt the Humanitarian," Crisis, 43 (October 1936), 298–99. 
49 Crisis, 43 (October 1936), 298–99; Pittsburgh Courier, November 3, 1934, I:10. 
50 Frank Freidel, F.D.R. and the South (Baton Rouge, 1965), 36, 73. 
51 Crisis, 41 (January 1934), 20; ibid., 43 (April 1936), 123. 
52 Pittsburgh Courier, October 6, 1934, I:1. 
53 Langston Hughes, Fight for Freedom: The Story of the NAACP (New York, 1962), 77; Pittsburgh Courier, April 25, 1936, I:1; Crisis, 42 (June 1935), 184. 
55 Pittsburgh Courier, July 16, 1932, II:2; ibid., October 7, 1933, II:3. 
57 Ibid., November 24, 1934, I:4. 
58 Ibid., October 29, 1936, I:1. 
59 Lubell, White and Black, Chapter 4, "The Roosevelt Revolution." 
61 Ibid., October 28, 1933, I:10. 
63 Ibid., May 7, 1936, I:7.