

CHAPTER 21

The New Deal, 1932-1940

135. Letter to Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins (1937)

Source: *Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner, ed., "Slaves of the Depression": Workers' Letters about Life on the Job (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987), pp. 103-04.*

The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt as president in 1932 did much to rekindle hope among the victims of the Great Depression, the worst economic disaster in American history. Throughout the 1930s, ordinary Americans, one of whom referred to the downtrodden as "slaves of the depression," wrote poignant letters to federal officials describing the oppressive working conditions of those who retained their jobs and the difficulty of finding work for the unemployed. They wrote of the threat of starvation, the impossibility of obtaining medical care when ill, and the abuses of dictatorial employers and supervisors. One such letter, addressed to Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, described the "terrible and inhuman condition" of workers in the sugar fields of Louisiana.

PLAQUEMINE, LOUISIANA, JULY 27, 1937

Dear Miss Perkins:

I am writing to you because I think you are pretty square to the average laboring man. but I am wondering if anyone has told you of the cruel and terrible condition that exist in this part of the country

or the so called sugar cane belt in Louisiana. I am sure that it hasn't made any progress or improvement since slavery days and to many people here that toil the soil or saw mills as laboring men I am sure slavery days were much better for the black slaves had their meals for sure three times a day and medical attention at that. but if an American nowadays had that much he is a communist I am speaking of the labor not the ones that the government give a sugar bounty too but the real forgotten people for the ones the government give the sugar bounty too are the ones that really don't need it for those same people that has drawn the sugar bonus for two years has never gave an extra penny to their white and black slaves labor. I will now make an effort to give you an idea of the terrible inhuman condition.

I will first give you the idea of the sugar cane tenants and plantations poor laboring people. The bell rings at 2 a.m. in the morning when all should really be sleeping at rest. they work in the summer until 9 or 10 a.m. the reason they knock them off from the heat is not because of killing the labor from heat but they are afraid it kills the mule not the slave. Their wages runs from 90¢ to \$1.10 per day. Their average days per week runs from three to four days a week in other words people that are living in so called United States have to live on the about \$4.00 per week standing of living in a so called American Community which is way below the Chinese standard of living for the Chinese at least have a cheaper food and clothing living but here one has to pay dear for food and clothing because these sugar cane slave owners *not* only give inhuman wages but the ones that work for them have to buy to their stores, which sells from 50 per cent to 60 per cent higher than the stores in town still these same people that are worst than the old time slave owners or yelling and hollering for more sugar protection, why should they get more when they don't pay their white and black slaves more. It is true they give the white and black slaves a place to live on. But Miss Perkins if you were to see these places they live on you'd swear that this is not our so call rich America with it high standing of living for I am sure that the lowest places in China or Mexico or Africa has better

places to live in. These Southern Senators which are backed by the big shots will tell you it is cheaper to live in the South but have you investigated their living condition. Sometimes I don't wonder why some of these people don't be really communism but they are true Americans only they are living in such a low standing of living that one wouldn't believe they are living in the good old U.S.A.

Now regarding the saw mills of this town and other towns in this section but most particular this town they pay slightly more than the plantation but they get it back by charging more for food & clothing which they have to buy in their stores.

I am writing you this hoping that you will try to read it and understand the situation which if you think is not true you can send an investigator in this section of Louisiana that has American freedom of speech for some hasn't that speech in our so called free America and if you can get in touch with people who are not concern about it I am sure you will see that I am right and I do hope that you are kind enough to give this your carefully attention and I am sure that President Roosevelt nor Mrs. Roosevelt nor you would like to see this terrible and inhuman condition go on worst now then old slavery days for I know you people believe in the real American standing of living.

Again I will call your attention if you don't believe of the slave wages condition in this lost part of U.S. investigate and you will find out. Thanking you for humanity sake.

R.J.

Questions

1. Why does the writer feel that Secretary of Labor Perkins will give the letter a sympathetic reading?
2. Why does the writer refer to "our so called free America"?

136. John Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies* (1936)

Source: John Steinbeck: excerpt from *The Harvest Gypsies* by John Steinbeck. Copyright © 1936 by The San Francisco News. Reprinted by permission of Heyday Books, Berkeley, California.

The 1930s had a devastating impact on American agriculture. The Great Depression, coupled with a prolonged drought and dust storms in the nation's heartland spurred an exodus of displaced farmers to nearby cities or to the promised land of California. John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and a popular film based on the book captured their plight, tracing a dispossessed family's trek from Oklahoma to California. Before the book appeared, Steinbeck had written a series of newspaper articles based on interviews with the migrants, later gathered in a book, *The Harvest Gypsies*.

THUS, IN CALIFORNIA we find a curious attitude toward a group that makes our agriculture successful. The migrants are needed, and they are hated. Arriving in a district they find the dislike always meted out by the resident to the foreigner, the outlander. This hatred of the stranger occurs in the whole range of human history, from the most primitive village form to our own highly organized industrial farming. The migrants are hated for the following reasons, that they are ignorant and dirty people, that they are carriers of disease, that they increase the necessity for police and the tax bill for schooling in a community, and that if they are allowed to organize they can, simply by refusing to work, wipe out the season's crops. They are never received into a community nor into the life of a community. Wanderers in fact, they are never allowed to feel at home in the communities that demand their services.

Let us see what kind of people they are, where they come from, and the routes of their wanderings. In the past they have been of several races, encouraged to come and often imported as cheap labor; Chinese in the early period, then Filipinos, Japanese and Mexicans.

These were foreigners, and as such they were ostracized and segregated and herded about.

If they attempted to organize they were deported or arrested, and having no advocates they were never able to get a hearing for their problems. But in recent years the foreign migrants have begun to organize, and at this danger signal they have been deported in great numbers, for there was a new reservoir from which a great quantity of cheap labor could be obtained.

The drought in the middle west has driven the agricultural populations of Oklahoma, Nebraska and parts of Kansas and Texas westward. Their lands are destroyed and they can never go back to them. Thousands of them are crossing the borders in ancient rattling automobiles, destitute and hungry and homeless, ready to accept any pay so that they may eat and feed their children. And this is a new thing in migrant labor, for the foreign workers were usually imported without their children and everything that remains of their old life with them.

They arrive in California usually having used up every resource to get here, even to the selling of the poor blankets and utensils and tools on the way to buy gasoline. They arrive bewildered and beaten and usually in a state of semi-starvation, with only one necessity to face immediately, and that is to find work at any wage in order that the family may eat.

And there is only one field in California that can receive them. Ineligible for relief, they must become migratory field workers. . . .

The earlier foreign migrants have invariably been drawn from a peon class. This is not the case with the new migrants. They are small farmers who have lost their farms, or farm hands who have lived with the family in the old American way. They are men who have worked hard on their own farms and have felt the pride of possessing and living in close touch with the land. They are resourceful and intelligent Americans who have gone through the hell of the drought, have seen their lands wither and die and the top soil blow away; and this, to a man who has owned his land, is a curious and terrible pain. . . .

And there is another difference between their old life and the new. They have come from the little farm districts where democracy was not only possible but inevitable, where popular government, whether practiced in the Grange, in church organization or in local government, was the responsibility of every man. And they have come into the country where, because of the movement necessary to make a living, they are not allowed any vote whatever, but are rather considered a properly unprivileged class.

. . . As one little boy in a squatters' camp said, "When they need us they call us migrants, and when we've picked their crop, we're bums and we got to get out."

Questions

1. How do the migrants of the 1930s differ from previous waves of migrant laborers who emigrated to California?
2. What does Steinbeck see as the impact of the farm migration on American democracy?

137. Steel Workers Organizing Committee, a New Declaration of Independence (1936)

Source: Steel Workers Organizing Committee: "Declaration of Independence by United Steel Workers of America," Steel Labor, August 1, 1936. Reprinted by permission of United Steelworkers.

The most striking development of the mid-1930s was the mobilization of millions of workers in mass production industries that had successfully resisted unionization. Previous depressions had devastated the labor movement. Unlike in the past, however, the federal government now seemed to be on the side of labor, as reflected in the Wagner Act of 1935, which granted workers the legal right to form unions.

In that year, labor leaders dissatisfied with the American Federation of Labor's policy of organizing workers along traditional craft lines called for

the creation of unions that united all workers in a specific industry. One such effort was the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, later the United Steelworkers of America. On July 4, 1936, 4,000 steelworkers gathered at Homestead, Pennsylvania, the site in 1892 of one of the most bitter strikes in American history, to claim their "inalienable rights," including the right to form a union. Modeled on the Declaration of Independence, their manifesto outlined the extreme tactics employers used to prevent unionization. In 1937, U.S. Steel, the country's single most important business firm, agreed to recognize the new steel workers' union.

ON JULY FOURTH, 1776, the American people declared their independence of political tyranny from which they had long suffered. They pledged themselves to protect the right of all to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

DESOTISM OF THE LORDS OF STEEL

But today we find the political liberty for which our forefathers fought is made meaningless by economic inequality. In the steel and other like industries a new despotism has come into being.

Through their control over the hours we work, the wages we receive, and the conditions of our labor, and through their denial of our right to organize freely and bargain collectively, the Lords of Steel try to rule us as did the royalists against whom our forefathers rebelled.

COMPANY UNIONS, SPIES, THUGS

They have interfered in every way with our right to organize in independent unions, discharging many who have joined them.

They have set up company unions, forcing employees to vote in their so-called elections.

They have sent among us swarms of stoolpigeons, who have spied upon us in the mills, in our meetings, and even in our homes.

They have kept among us armies of company gunmen, with stores of machine guns, gas bombs, and other weapons of warfare.

COMPANIES HEED NO APPEAL—

In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms.

We have used every channel of the so-called representation to put forward our requests and grievances. But all we have found is that the employers control these plans and refuse to grant requests which are not backed by independent organizations.

—OR LAW

We have appealed to the government to protect us in our right to organize freely without interference from our employers.

We have presented cases of interference and discrimination without number to government labor boards. They have ruled that our employers must observe the law by reinstating discharged unionists and ceasing to interfere with their employees' rights. But our employers have defied these rulings.

WE ARE AMERICANS!

So we steel workers do today solemnly publish and declare our independence. We say to the world: "We are Americans." We shall exercise our inalienable rights to organize into a great industrial union, banded together with all our fellow steel workers.

WE PLEDGE OUR LIVES—

Through this union, we shall win higher wages, shorter hours, and a better standard of living. We shall win leisure for ourselves, and opportunity for our children. Together with our union brothers in

other industries, we shall abolish industrial despotism. We shall make real the dreams of the pioneers who pictured America as a land where all might live in comfort and happiness.

In support of this declaration, we mutually pledge to each other our steadfast purpose as union men, our honor and our very lives.

Questions

1. How do the workers appeal to American nationalism in pressing their claims?
2. How are the language and form of the document consciously modeled on the Declaration of Independence of 1776?

138. Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Greater Security for the Average Man" (1934)

Source: Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt (13 vols.: New York, 1938-1950), vol. 3, pp. 420-22.

Along with being a superb politician, Franklin D. Roosevelt was a master of political communication. Through his fireside chats, he used the new medium of radio to bring his message directly into Americans' living rooms, bypassing the mostly pro-Republican press. Roosevelt worked to reclaim the word "freedom" from conservatives, and made it a rallying cry for the New Deal. Throughout the 1930s, he consistently linked freedom with economic security and identified economic inequality as its greatest enemy. In this excerpt from one of the fireside chats of 1934, Roosevelt directly challenges the idea that government intervention in the economy threatens American freedom. The older view of liberty, he insisted, served the needs only of "the privileged few." He would continue this argument during his campaign for reelection in 1936, when he triumphed with over 60 percent of the popular vote.

TO THOSE WHO say that our expenditures for public works and other means for recovery are a waste that we cannot afford, I answer that no country, however rich, can afford the waste of its human resources. Demoralization caused by vast unemployment is our greatest extravagance. Morally, it is the greatest menace to our social order. Some people try to tell me that we must make up our minds that in the future we shall permanently have millions of unemployed just as other countries have had them for over a decade. What may be necessary for those countries is not my responsibility to determine. But as for this country, I stand or fall by my refusal to accept as a necessary condition of our future a permanent army of unemployed. On the contrary, we must make it a national principle that we will not tolerate a large army of unemployed and that we will arrange our national economy to end our present unemployment. . . . I do not want to think that it is the destiny of any American to remain permanently on relief rolls.

In our efforts for recovery we have avoided, on the one hand, the theory that business should and must be taken over into an all-embracing Government. We have avoided, on the other hand, the equally untenable theory that it is an interference with liberty to offer reasonable help when private enterprise is in need of help. The course we have followed fits the American practice of Government, a practice of taking action step by step, of regulating only to meet concrete needs, a practice of courageous recognition of change. I believe with Abraham Lincoln, that "The legitimate object of Government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do at all or cannot do so well for themselves in their separate and individual capacities."

I am not for a return to that definition of liberty under which for many years a free people were being gradually regimented into the service of the privileged few. I prefer and I am sure you prefer that broader definition of liberty under which we are moving forward to greater freedom, to greater security for the average man than he has ever known before in the history of America.

Question

1. How does Roosevelt think that American understandings of freedom should change?
2. Why does Roosevelt feel that mass unemployment is a threat to American freedom?

139. Herbert Hoover on the New Deal and Liberty (1936)

Source: Herbert Hoover: "On the New Deal and Liberty," Official Report of the Proceedings of the 21st Republican National Convention, 1936, pp. 115-19, 122-24. Reprinted by permission of the Republican National Committee.

Even as Roosevelt invoked the word to uphold the New Deal, "liberty"—in the sense of freedom from powerful government—became the fighting slogan of his opponents. As the 1930s progressed, opponents of the New Deal invoked the language of liberty with greater and greater passion. Freedom, they claimed, meant unrestrained economic opportunity for the enterprising individual. In a speech at the Republican National Convention of 1936, former President Hoover accused his successor of endangering "fundamental American liberties." Roosevelt, he charged, was either operating out of sheer opportunism, with no coherent purpose of policy, or was conspiring to impose "European ideas" on the United States. The election, he continued, in strident language that reflected how wide the gap between the parties had become, was a "holy crusade for liberty" that would "determine the future" of freedom in the United States.

IN THIS ROOM rests the greatest responsibility that has come to a body of Americans in three generations. In the lesser sense this is a convention of a great political party. But in the larger sense it is a convention of Americans to determine the fate of those ideals for

which this nation was founded. That far transcends all partisanship.

There are elemental currents which make or break the fate of nations. There is a moral purpose in the universe. Those forces which affect the vitality and the soul of a people will control its destinies. The sum of years of public service in these currents is the overwhelming conviction of their transcendent importance over the more transitory, even though difficult, issues of national life.

I have given about four years to research into the New Deal, trying to determine what its ultimate objectives were, what sort of a system it is imposing on this country.

To some people it appears to be a strange interlude in American history in that it has no philosophy, that it is sheer opportunism, that it is a muddle of a spoils system, of emotional economics, of reckless adventure, of unctuous claims to a monopoly of human sympathy, of greed for power, of a desire for popular acclaim and an aspiration to make the front pages of the newspapers. That is the most charitable view.

To other people it appears to be a cold-blooded attempt by starry-eyed boys to infect the American people by a mixture of European ideas, flavored with our native predilection to get something for nothing.

You can choose either one you like best. But the first is the road of chaos which leads to the second. Both of these roads lead over the same grim precipice that is the crippling and possibly the destruction of the freedom of men.

. . .

We have seen these gigantic expenditures and this torrent of waste pile up a national debt which two generations cannot repay. One time I told a Democratic Congress that "you cannot spend yourselves into prosperity." You recall that advice did not take then. It hasn't taken yet. Billions have been spent to prime the economic pump. It did employ a horde of paid officials upon the pump handle. We have seen the frantic attempts to find new taxes on the rich. Yet

three-quarters of the bill will be sent to the average man and the poor. He and his wife and his grandchildren will be giving a quarter of all their working days to pay taxes. Freedom to work for himself is changed into a slavery of work for the follies of government.

We have seen an explosive inflation of bank credits by this government borrowing. We have seen varied steps toward currency inflation that have already enriched the speculator and deprived the poor. If this is to continue the end result is the tears and anguish of universal bankruptcy and distress. No democracy in history has survived its final stages.

We have seen the building up of a horde of political officials, we have seen the pressures upon the helpless and destitute to trade political support for relief. Both are a pollution of the very fountains of liberty.

We have seen the most elemental violation of economic law and experience. The New Deal forgets it is solely by production of more goods and more varieties of goods and services that we advance the living and security of men. If we constantly decrease costs and prices and keep up earnings the production of plenty will be more and more widely distributed. These laws may be restitched in new phrases so that they are the very shoes of human progress. We had so triumphed in this long climb of mankind toward plenty that we had reached Mount Pisgah where we looked over the promised land of abolished poverty. Then men began to quarrel over the division of the goods. The depression produced by war destruction temporarily checked our march toward the promised land.

...

Great calamities have come to the whole world. These forces have reached into every calling and every cottage. They have brought tragedy and suffering to millions of firesides. I have great sympathy for those who honestly reach for short cuts to the immensity of our problems. While design of the structure of betterment for the common man must be inspired by the human heart, it can only be achieved by the intellect. It can only be builded by using the mould of justice, by laying brick upon brick from the materials of scientific

research; by the painstaking sifting of truth from the collection of fact and experience. Any other mould is distorted; any other bricks are without straw; any other foundations are sand. That great structure of human progress can be built only by free men and women.

The gravest task which confronts the party is to regenerate these freedoms.

...

Fundamental American liberties are at stake. Is the Republican party ready for the issue? Are you willing to cast your all upon the issue, or would you falter and look back? Will you, for expediency's sake, also offer will-o'-the-wisps which beguile the people? Or have you determined to enter in a holy crusade for liberty which shall determine the future and the perpetuity for a nation of free men? That star shell fired today over the no man's land of world despair would illuminate the world with hope.

Questions

1. Why does Hoover believe that the future of freedom is at stake in the election of 1936?
2. How does his definition of freedom differ from that of Roosevelt?

140. Norman Cousins, "Will Women Lose Their Jobs?" (1939)

Source: Norman Cousins: "Will Women Lose Their Jobs?" Current History and Forum, September 1939, Volume 51, from The Depression and New Deal: A History in Documents by Robert S. McElvaine, pp. 110-13. Copyright © 2000 by Robert S. McElvaine. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

Mass unemployment during the 1930s persuaded many Americans that women were taking jobs that would otherwise go to men. The federal government prohibited both members of a married couple from holding

government jobs and many states and localities prohibited the hiring of women whose husbands earned a "living wage." In the excerpt that follows, the writer Norman Cousins commented on the movement to reduce or eliminate women's presence in the workforce and the various arguments, economic and moral, that lay behind it.

HERE IS THE latest depression cure-all, results guaranteed by its supporters:

"There are approximately 10,000,000 people out of work in the United States today. There are also 10,000,000 or more women, married and single, who are job-holders. Simply fire the women, who shouldn't be working anyway, and hire the men. Presto! No unemployment. No relief rolls. No depression."

This is the general idea behind the greatest assault on women's rights in two decades. Its supporters include not only the something-for-nothing groups which can always be depended upon to support chain-letter movements and share-the-wealth plans, but a large section of public opinion—as yet unacquainted with all the facts—which finds it hard to resist the supposed logic of millions of unemployed men replacing millions of employed women. Impetus to the drive—at least psychologically—is lent by the fact that the payrolls of many communities and private organizations are open only to males.

The first move toward the complete defeminizing of public and private jobs is discrimination against the married woman. Having thus inserted its foot in the door, the oust-women campaign seeks eventually to enter and hang up the verboten [German for "forbidden"] sign to all women, married or single, employed or seeking employment. . . .

Of such concern is this trend to the nation's women leaders that it has been called the greatest issue to affect women since their victorious fight for suffrage. In its recent convention at Kansas City, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs

announced a frontal attack on what it considers the most serious problem it has faced in twenty years. In the eyes of Federation leaders the legislation already introduced is a portent of even more widespread attacks to come. . . .

There are, of course, many familiar "moral" arguments against the working wife: woman's place is in the home, the management of which is enough work for any person; her first allegiance is to the bearing and raising of children; there is a direct relationship between the increase of women in business and the declining birth rate. . . .

The Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor reports that in recent years the majority of married women at work have been working not because of a desire for a career or for economic independence but because of the need to provide or supplement the family income. . . .

Analysis of these figures prompts the Department of Labor to point out that competition in industry is between one man and another, rather than between men and women. At most, not more than 1,000,000 jobs now held by women could pass to men. And of the 3,000,000-old jobs held by women who admittedly are married, probably no more than 300,000 could be satisfactorily or willingly filled by males. This would "create" new jobs for only 3 per cent of the men now out of work.

Fundamentally, the unemployment of men is not caused by women who hold jobs but by the infirmities of the economic structure itself. Nor is the depression an affliction visited exclusively upon the male; the woman must bear her part of the burden, as more than 2,000,000 unemployed women can attest. . . .

In answer to all of which the oust-women-from-jobs group may say that, yes, we are living in changing times and that, indeed, this is an emergency. And that, they may add, is precisely why extreme measures are needed and justified. Millions of men, many of them with families, are out of work. Most of them would be satisfied with salaries now paid to women. The ouster should begin with the working married woman because she should be dependent upon the man.

After that, single women should be withdrawn from jobs. And who will look after them? Well, someone will; someone always does. Besides, unemployment with women is a matter of relative hardship at worst. But with men—especially family men—the hardship is absolute and complete. The state should have the right to step in and, for the greater benefit of all, say who shall work and who shall not.

An intriguing but hardly a practical thought. Because the more you study the figures of the various occupations which would be involved in the taking over of women's jobs by men, the more preposterous the scheme becomes. Imagine an average day in an America without working women:

John Citizen arrives at his office to be greeted by a male receptionist, a male switchboard operator and a male private secretary who opens his mail, arranges his appointments and takes dictation. At lunch his favorite waitress is missing, her place taken by a young man. At three o'clock he visits his dentist and is greeted by a male nurse. At four-thirty Mrs. Citizen calls to complain about Harry, who has taken the place of the part-time maid, and who refuses to wash the baby's clothes.

At the dinner table, Mary, who has just entered kindergarten, complains about Mr. Mann, the new teacher. Mrs. Citizen resents the personal questions asked by the new male salesclerk when she went shopping for underwear. She also resents the husky baritone voice that moans "Number, please," every time she picks up the phone.

Ridiculous? Certainly. But this is what a general purge of all women in industry would mean. It is impossible to carry through a large-scale replacement of one large bloc of labor for another unless there is an identity of functions all along the line. Approximately 3,500,000 men out of work are manual laborers. Which places vacated by women can they take? Approximately 3,100,000 women are employed as domestics. Which men want to take their places? There are about 920,000 salesgirls, whose replacement by men in most cases would be ludicrous. . . .

But even outside the economic sphere, arguments against the working wife reveal weakness. There is much talk about the mother's place in the home, very little about the fact that the home has changed. Housekeeping for the average family today is no longer a full-time job. We are no longer living in the days when families numbered a dozen or more, and, what with cooking, baking, canning, washing, spinning, sewing and mending, woman's work was never done. The average American family today numbers three children or less, who are away from home at least five hours a day. Inexpensive, modern gadgets simplify what were once long, tedious household tasks. In short, the home has changed from a producing to a consuming unit.

This change is reflected not only in employment of married women but in the growth of social and church work, and in the spread of adult education, of culture and entertainment groups. In these circumstances, it is difficult to blame the married woman who is not content to remain a semi-idle dependent, but who seeks in business an outlet for her talents and energies. Dr. Richard Cabot, of Boston, recently noted that many of his nervous patients were women suffering for want of serious occupational interest.

Nazi Germany thought it could casually disregard these important questions when it decided to oust its 900,000 women workers from industrial and governmental life. For years Germany had been looked upon as the foremost example of a nation in which, to the benefit of the state, equal rights for women were scrupulously upheld. The Nazi regime waded the women out of their jobs and herded them back to the home, where they were told to bear children.

However as Clifford Kirkpatrick revealed in *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life*, the Nazi conception of woman as a biological instrument soon changed when it was realized that no such large bloc of labor could be displaced—or even replaced—without severely upsetting the national economy. "The 'sacred' mothers went back to the machine," observed Dr. Kirkpatrick, "and the employment of women even increased." . . .

... [I]n the final analysis this question of women and jobs will be fought out on the issue of equal rights and opportunities for men and women alike.

Questions

1. Why does Cousins consider the effort to replace employed women with men "the greatest assault on women's rights in two decades"?
2. Why does he consider the proposal impractical?

141. Frank H. Hill on the Indian New Deal (1935)

Source: Frank Hill: "A New Pattern of Life for the Indian," New York Times Magazine, July 14, 1935, from The Depression and New Deal: A History in Documents by Robert S. McElvaine, pp. 118-20. Copyright © 2000 by Robert S. McElvaine. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

The New Deal marked the most radical shift in Indian policy in the nation's history. Under Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, the administration launched an "Indian New Deal," which ended the policy of forced assimilation and allowed Indians unprecedented cultural autonomy. It replaced boarding schools meant to eradicate the tribal heritage of Indian children with schools on reservations and dramatically increased spending on Indian health. Federal authorities once again recognized Indians' right to govern their own affairs.

In 1935, the journalist Frank E. Hill presented a glowing description of the Indian New Deal among the Navajo, the nation's largest tribe. He stressed the benefits of the new policy for Indians, but did not mention that the Navajo strongly protested against a federal soil conservation program that required them to reduce their herds of livestock—an indication that their sovereignty was far from absolute.

MORE THAN A mile above the sea level, on a plateau of the American Southwest, two hundred and fifty men are building a new capitol. It is not the capitol of a State. Its stone walls rise in shapes that are strange to most Americans; its name—Nee Alneeng—falls with a strange accent. Nee Alneeng belongs to a world far from Manhattan and Main Street. It is an Indian world, and the capitol belongs to the Navajo, now the largest of the North American tribes.

This little centre is symbolic of a new way of life among the Navajo: in fact, a new way of life for the 340,000 Indians of the United States. A year ago the Wheeler-Howard Act gave to the tribes the right to decide whether they would accept important privileges in education, self-determination and self-government. A popular vote was asked; the essential question was: "Do you want to help save yourselves?" ...

Thus the Wheeler-Howard Act embodies an Indian policy far different from that pursued in the past. The Federal Government could have conferred self-government upon the American Indian without asking him if he wanted it. To understand why he was asked, one must take a brief but discriminating glance at American history as it has affected the Red man. ...

The third stage may be said to have begun with the growing conviction among thoughtful Americans that Indian life had latent strength and important cultural values and that the Indian if given the right opportunities could do what the government had failed to do: he could arrange a place for himself and his customs in this modern America. The appointment of John Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs in April, 1933, brought into power a leader of this trend of opinion. ...

Mr. Collier, slight, almost scholarly in appearance, at his desk in Washington describes what the administration is trying to do for the Indian and why he believes the new policy to be enlightened.

"In the past," he says, "the government tried to encourage economic independence and initiative by the allotment system, giving

each Indian a portion of land and the right to dispose of it. As a result, of the 138,000,000 acres which Indians possessed in 1887 they have lost all but 47,000,000 acres, and the lost area includes the land that was the most valuable. Further, the government sought to give the Indian the schooling of the whites, teaching him to despise his old customs and habits as barbaric. Through this experiment the Indian lost much of his understanding of his own culture and received no usable substitute. In many areas such efforts to change the Indian have broken him economically and spiritually.

"We have proposed in opposition to such a policy to recognize and respect the Indian as he is. We think he must be so accepted before he can be assisted to become something else, if that is desirable. It is objected that we are proposing to make a 'blanket Indian' of him again. That is nonsense. But if he happens to be a blanket Indian we think he should not be ashamed of it. We believe further that while he needs protection and assistance in important ways, these aids should be extended with the idea of enabling him to help himself. We are sure that he can and will do this. But he must have the opportunity to do it in his own way. This is what we have been trying to extend to him. It is an opportunity that he has not had since he entered the reservations, where he has been discouraged from thinking and acting for himself.

"... Our design is to plow up the Indian soul, to make the Indian again the master of his own mind. If this fails, everything fails; if it succeeds, we believe the Indian will do the rest." ...

The people whom the commissioner is trying to reanimate, and to incite to this crusade for self-survival, are in one sense heterogeneous. There is no typical Indian but rather a hundred different types. These are scattered. The 230 tribes that comprise the race are to be found here and there in twenty-two States. They are of many different stocks physically and they speak dozens of different languages.

Their cultures vary, and so does the degree to which they have adopted the white man's ways. ...

Underneath all their differences lie identical, unifying instincts, habits, aptitudes and spiritual feelings. Fine qualities are to be observed in almost any Indian group: artistic cleverness, tenacity, courage, dignity, and a decent pride. Under the parochial control of the past, with its effort to make the Indian a white man, these qualities have shown but little. They have come out best where the Indian, as in the Southwest, has lived his own life. ...

The new policy has already started a renaissance in Indian arts. Young Indians are painting murals on the walls of school houses and government buildings. They are studying the ancient pottery of their tribes in museums, and devising new designs and textures in their workshops. The young people are flocking to the ceremonial dances, which for a time they had avoided. This cultural revival goes hand in hand with an interest in self-government and economic independence. In Mr. Collier's opinion, it is equally valuable.

"The Indian," he says, "can use white technologies and remain an Indian. Modernity and white Americanism are not identical. If the Indian life is a good life, then we should be proud and glad to have this different and native culture going on by the side of ours. Anything less than to let Indian culture live on would be a crime against the earth itself. The destruction of a pueblo is a barbarous thing. America is coming to understand this, and to know that in helping the Indian to save himself we are helping to save something that is precious to us as well as to him."

Questions

1. How does Hill describe the motivations for the Indian New Deal?
2. What benefits does he believe the new federal policy brings to the Indians?

142. W. E. B. Du Bois, "A Negro Nation within a Nation" (1935)

Source: W. E. B. Du Bois: "A Negro Nation within a Nation," Reprinted with permission from Current History magazine (June 1935). © 2010 Current History, Inc.

As the "last hired and first fired," African-Americans were hit hardest by the Depression. Half of the families in Harlem received public assistance during the 1930s. But many New Deal programs were either administered in an extremely discriminatory manner or, like Social Security, excluded most blacks from benefits at the insistence of white supremacist southern representatives who controlled key committees in Congress.

During the 1930s, W. E. B. Du Bois abandoned his earlier goal of racial integration as unrealistic for the foreseeable future. He now concluded that blacks must recognize themselves as "a nation within a nation." He called on blacks to organize for economic survival by building an independent, cooperative economy within their segregated communities, and gain control of their own separate schools. Du Bois's shifting position illustrated how the Depression had propelled economic survival to the top of the black agenda and how, despite the social changes of the 1930s, the goal of racial integration remained as remote as ever.

IN THIS BROADER and more intelligent democracy we can hope for progressive softening of the asperities and anomalies of race prejudice, but we cannot hope for its early and complete disappearance. Above all, the doubt, deep-planted in the American mind, as to the Negro's ability and efficiency as worker, artisan and administrator will fade but slowly. Thus, with increased democratic control of industry and capital, the place of the Negro will be increasingly a matter of human choice, of willingness to recognize ability across the barriers of race, of putting fit Negroes in places of power and authority by public opinion. At present, on the railroads, in manufacturing, in the telephone, telegraph and radio business, and in the

larger divisions of trade, it is only under exceptional circumstances that any Negro no matter what his ability, gets an opportunity for position and power. Only in those lines where individual enterprise still counts, as in some of the professions, in a few of the trades, in a few branches of retail business and in artistic careers, can the Negro expect a narrow opening.

Negroes and other colored folk nevertheless, exist in larger and growing numbers. Slavery, prostitution to white men, theft of their labor and goods have not killed them and cannot kill them. They are growing in intelligence and dissatisfaction. They occupy strategic positions, within nations and beside nations, amid valuable raw material and on the highways of future expansion. They will survive, but on what terms and conditions? On this point a new school of Negro thought is arising. It believes in the ultimate uniting of mankind and in a unified American nation, with economic classes and racial barriers leveled, but it believes this is an ideal and is to be realized only by such intensified class and race consciousness as will bring irresistible force rather than mere humanitarian appeals to bear on the motives and actions of men.

The peculiar position of Negroes in America offers an opportunity. Negroes today cast probably 2,000,000 votes in a total of 40,000,000, and their vote will increase. This gives them, particularly in northern cities, and at critical times, a chance to hold a very considerable balance of power, and the mere threat of this being used intelligently and with determination may often mean much. The consuming power of 2,800,000 Negro families has recently been estimated at \$166,000,000 a month—a tremendous power when intelligently directed. Their manpower as laborers probably equals that of Mexico or Yugoslavia. Their illiteracy is much lower than that of Spain or Italy. Their estimated per capita wealth about equals that of Japan.

For a nation with this start in culture and efficiency to sit down and await the salvation of a white God is idiotic. With the use of their political power, their power as consumers, and their brainpower,

added to that chance of personal appeal which proximity and neighborhood always give to human beings, Negroes can develop in the United States an economic nation within a nation, able to work through inner cooperation, to found its own institutions, to educate its genius, and at the same time, without mob violence or extremes of race hatred, to keep in helpful touch and cooperate with the mass of the nation. This has happened more often than most people realize, in the case of groups not so obviously separated from the mass of people as are American Negroes. It must happen in our case, or there is no hope for the Negro in America.

Any movement toward such a program is today hindered by the absurd Negro philosophy of Scatter, Suppress, Wait, Escape. There are even many of our educated young leaders who think that because the Negro problem is not in evidence where there are few or no Negroes, this indicates a way out! They think that the problem of race can be settled by ignoring it and suppressing all reference to it. They think that we have only to wait in silence for the white people to settle the problem for us; and finally and predominantly, they think that the problem of twelve million Negro people, mostly poor, ignorant workers, is going to be settled by having their more educated and wealthy classes gradually and continually escape from their race into the mass of the American people, leaving the rest to sink, suffer and die.

Proponents of this program claim, with much reason, that the plight of the masses is not the fault of the emerging classes. For the slavery and exploitation that reduced Negroes to their present level or at any rate hindered them from rising, the white world is to blame. Since the age-long process of raising a group is through the escape of its upper class into welcome fellowship with risen peoples, the Negro intelligentsia would submerge itself if it bent its back to the task of lifting the mass of people. There is logic in this answer, but futile logic.

If the leading Negro classes cannot assume and bear the uplift of their own proletariat, they are doomed for all time. It is not a case of

ethics; it is a plain case of necessity. The method by which this may be done is, first, for the American Negro to achieve a new economic solidarity.

There exists today a chance for the Negroes to organize a cooperative state within their own group. By letting Negro farmers feed Negro artisans, and Negro technicians guide Negro home industries, and Negro thinkers plan this integration of cooperation, while Negro artists dramatize and beautify the struggle, economic independence can be achieved. To doubt that this is possible is to doubt the essential humanity and the quality of brains of the American Negro.

No sooner is this proposed than a great fear sweeps over older Negroes. They cry "No segregation"—no further yielding to prejudice and race separation. Yet any planning for the benefit of American Negroes on the part of a Negro intelligentsia is going to involve organized and deliberate self-segregation. There are plenty of people in the United States who would be only too willing to use such a plan as a way to increase existing legal and customary segregation between the races. This threat which many Negroes see is no mere mirage. What of it? It must be faced.

If the economic and cultural salvation of the American Negro calls for an increase in segregation and prejudice, then that must come. American Negroes must plan for their economic future and the social survival of their fellows in the firm belief that this means in a real sense the survival of colored folk in the world and the building of a full humanity instead of a petty white tyranny. Control of their own education, which is the logical and inevitable end of separate schools, would not be an unmixed ill; it might prove a supreme good. Negro schools once meant poor schools. They need not today; they must not tomorrow. Separate Negro sections will increase race antagonism, but they will also increase economic cooperation, organized self-defense and necessary self-confidence.

Questions

1. Why does Du Bois believe that the situation of American blacks was as "critical" in the 1930s as at any previous point in the nation's past?
2. Why does he feel that economic "self-segregation" offers a more viable strategy for blacks than continued pressure for racial integration?

CHAPTER 22

Fighting for the Four Freedoms: World War II, 1941–1945

143. Franklin D. Roosevelt on the Four Freedoms (1941)

Source: Annual Message to Congress, January 6, 1941, in Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (New York, 1938–1950), Vol. 9, p. 672.

As in other American wars, freedom became a rallying cry and language of national unity during World War II. Even before the United States entered the war President Roosevelt outlined to Congress his vision of a future world order founded on the "essential human freedoms": freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The Four Freedoms became Roosevelt's favorite statement of Allied aims. Freedom from fear meant not only a longing for peace but a more general desire for security in a world that appeared to be out of control. Freedom of speech and religion scarcely required detailed explanation. Freedom from want was the most controversial of the four. To FDR, it meant economic security; to his critics, the phrase conjured up images of socialism or of Americans living off the largesse of the government.