

Reading A Time Line *cont'd*

amendments? Or were further amendments in the Constitution needed? Discuss.

4. Why would socialists have felt that their demands would have been taken more seriously than those of, say, ordinary citizens in the 1800s? Do you think that a socialist government might have ended up as inadequate in enforcing anti-slavery

amendments as the type of government the U.S. had until 1920?

5. How do you think later experience of how communism was pursued by the Soviet Union and other countries in the 20th century might have changed the minds of African Americans about communism as a worthwhile political choice for them?



Use the Internet and other resource materials to identify three countries, other than Russia, where communism developed. Write a paragraph for each country, describing the reasons you think communism flourished there. Then, in small groups, discuss the reasons that you

think some African Americans became interested in the Communist Party and the reasons that many became disillusioned with the party.

Multiple Perspectives

Your class has decided to become a brand-new nation. Select a three-person panel that will promote socialism as the form of government for the new country. Create another panel to promote the benefits of capitalism in the new nation.

Name a moderator for the panels and begin a debate on the pros and cons of each system. The rest of the class will act as the new country's citizens and decide on the form of government they would like.

CENTER YOUR WRITING

Write a report on why and how communism ended in the former Soviet Union. Include your reasons, pro or con, for feeling that communism will or will

not return to that country. Take into account the effect of communism on various minority groups in other parts of the world.

40



AS YOU READ

- How did the Great Depression affect African Americans?
- What effect did racism have on relief efforts of the New Deal?
- What was the role of the Black Cabinet?
- How did African Americans demonstrate against discrimination in the workforce?
- How did Eleanor Roosevelt support the African American community?

Chapter Outline

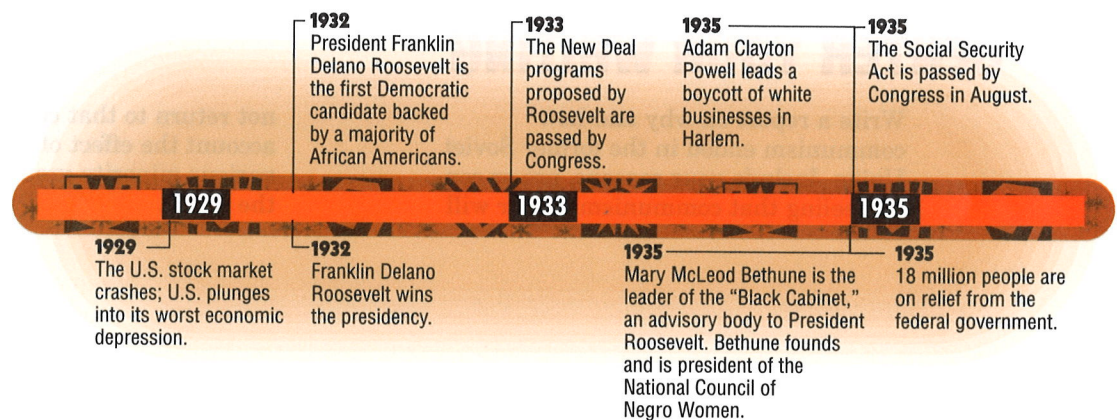
- Hard Times
- FDR's New Deal
- Mary McLeod Bethune Runs the Black Cabinet
- Breaking New Ground
- African Americans and the Unions

Vocabulary

- The Great Depression • rent party • The New Deal • Dixiecrats
- Social Security • bartering system • Black Cabinet

Hard Times

African American-owned businesses experienced an all-time high right before the American economy crashed in October 1929. Banks closed down. Thousands of people lost their lifelong savings. Of the 8,812 banks to fail between 1930 and 1933, 12 were African American. Those who had money in the banks were now as poor as those who did not. Many people suffered from hunger. Times were hard and misery was everywhere. This period was called **The Great Depression**. It was the most damaging economic crisis in United States history. Prices on the stock market, where shares of companies are bought and sold, frequently plummeted to zero. Rich people lost millions of dollars and some committed suicide. Financiers had heart attacks. The times were terrible.



DID YOU KNOW?



Between the end of Reconstruction and 1910, African Americans set up a wide variety of small businesses in the South. They included grocery stores, restaurants, hotels, drugstores, barber shops, and more.

The full impact of the Great Depression hit the African American community at the same time that Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, and Madame C. J. Walker were becoming household names.

Harlem and African American communities all over the country were not immune to the terrible times. In the middle of 125th Street, a young man passed out handbills to all passers-by one cold February morning in 1930. The handbill announced:

“A Rent Party for Mary Williams, on Sunday at 3 PM. Come One, Come All.”

The **rent party** was a common feature in the African American community during the Great Depression. If you could not pay your rent, you invited your friends and neighbors over for a rent party and they would give you whatever they could. These parties, sometimes with house bands and gambling, were very common in large cities.

The bottom had fallen out of the economy nearly nine months after Republican Herbert Hoover had been inaugurated as president. By 1932 there were 15 million people unemployed, nearly 25 percent of the American workforce.

As the 1932 election drew near, there was a clear indication that the African American community would make one of the biggest political shifts in history: African American voters would drop their loyalty to

Republicans and turn to the Democrats. The African American population overwhelmingly supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the election, making Hoover a one-term president. Roosevelt had campaigned for the “forgotten man” and promised a “new deal” for the American people. African Americans sincerely hoped it would not be the same old raw deal.

FDR's New Deal

The election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 lifted the spirits of the African American people, not because Roosevelt had promised anything specifically to African Americans but because he had pledged himself to a program of uplift for the ordinary people. It would not take long for them to adopt **The “New Deal”** as their motto.

They believed that anything good for the ordinary people, the poor and downtrodden,



A long line of jobless and homeless men wait for a free meal at New York City's Municipal Lodging House. Such sights were common in the winter of 1932-33 during The Great Depression.

would be good for the African American community. Roosevelt, who had been governor of New York, spoke the language of the masses and inspired confidence during a time of deep economic trouble.

The African American community voted overwhelmingly for Roosevelt, a Democrat, leaving the Republican Party, the Party of Lincoln, for the first time since Reconstruction (1855–1877). At the local level in the South, the Democrats were often **Dixiecrats**, white politicians who opposed the Republicans because of the Civil War. They wanted to keep African Americans from political power. At the national level, however, Democrats had effectively become the party of the “little people” and the “forgotten Americans.” African Americans identified with the northern and national Democratic Party more than they did with the Republican Party.

Roosevelt had promised that he would introduce legislation that would insure that as people got older they would not become beggars on the street. To this end, he promised **Social Security** and numerous other programs to secure the economic positions of those who had given their useful lives to the national economy.

Congress passed the Social Security Act in 1935. It provided both old-age insurance and unemployment insurance for workers. In addition, the act granted federal dollars to the states for public welfare programs, including assistance to the blind and handicapped, dependent children, destitute children and the elderly.

African Americans were frequently domestic servants and farm workers and Social Security provisions did not cover these two categories of workers.

Roosevelt set up numerous agencies to aid the poor and to assist the homeless. The Public Works Administration (PWA) used African Americans alongside other workers to build public housing units. African Americans later occupied many of these units. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was the most

famous of all the agencies among African Americans because it gave jobs to so many of them. African Americans held more than 20 percent of the jobs at the agency. Congress soon passed, under the leadership of progressive Democrats, laws setting up programs with the provision that,

“There shall be no discrimination on the basis of race, creed, or color.”

While the New Deal had promised as much, its programs were still administered by human beings who often found it difficult to give up negative attitudes toward African Americans. All the agencies established, however, were supposed to adhere to the “non-discrimination” edict.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL RELIEF

The New Deal had three goals—relief, recovery, and reform. Eighteen million people were on relief, or welfare, in 1935. Three million were African Americans. There was not much discrimination in the direct relief of food and commodities, but when it came to work relief, African Americans were given fewer skilled jobs than whites.

Pawning furniture, jewelry, and clothes became common in the African American community because very few families had any money. Pawnshops sprang up to take advantage of all the things—sometimes worthless—that people tried to sell.

Churches and social groups established soup kitchens and gave out apples to hungry people. Father Divine (George Baker), a religious leader of a cult, set up a large network of kitchens to dispense soup to starving people in cities such as Philadelphia and New York. The homeless were housed in shelters. The New Deal Administration launched a series of programs with the idea of jump-starting the economy. It used names such as the Public Works Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps, Works Progress Administration, Federal Arts Project, and the National Youth Administration.

PULLING TOGETHER

During the crisis in the economy, the only way some African Americans could survive was by pulling together. Farmers in the South, for example, used the **bartering system** to sustain themselves. In bartering, people exchange goods and services with each other rather than money. For example, a person might help a farmer milk his cows in exchange for a gallon of milk, or a barber might cut a farmer's hair for a dozen eggs. Since almost no one had money, the sharing of food was the basis of most rural existence.

In cities the creation of church and social club welfare programs added to the provisions from the government. Most people in the cities either worked in assistance of some type or were on assistance. Medical care, food, and clothing were provided by emergency relief committees, some of them set up by the newly formed National Urban League.

LAST HIRED, FIRST FIRED

"The last hired and the first fired" was a phrase repeated in the African American community during the Great Depression. In fact, African Americans were often the last persons to be hired in the automobile and steel industries, the two major industries of the period. In the event of a business downturn or depression, the first people to be laid off from work were African Americans. They wanted to work. They had been among the best workers in America and certainly no one could doubt that they worked hard during enslavement. New immigrants from Europe also put pressure on the faltering economy. Tensions between white workers and African American workers who sought to work in industry often led to hostilities. Yet African Americans were convinced that without a struggle they would never be granted jobs. Thus, they demonstrated against racial discrimination in jobs, formed the New Negro Alliance, and organized campaigns protesting against businesses that discriminated against African Americans as patrons or employees.

The Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, initiated a "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaign in 1935. He asked the people of Harlem to boycott the white-owned stores there that refused to hire blacks. The boycotts of stores provided Powell with exposure and a springboard to political office. He became the first African American to sit on the New York City Council in 1941, and was elected to Congress three years later. Powell was reelected to 11 successive terms, eventually securing the powerful chairmanship of the House Committee on Education and Labor.

Mary McLeod Bethune Runs the Black Cabinet

Mary McLeod Bethune, an educator and founder of Bethune College in Daytona Beach, Florida, was selected to run the New Deal's National Youth Administration. This agency actively assisted more than 300,000 African Americans and made Mary McLeod Bethune a household name in the African American community. Through her efforts, she had shown that President Roosevelt was for the "little people."

Ms. Bethune sought to make her agency as responsive as possible to ordinary Americans and especially to ensure that African Americans would participate equally in all the resources of the government. If people were to see its greatest task as "putting people to work," then the National Youth Administration would play its part alongside the dozen or so other programs established by the Roosevelt Administration.

During her tenure, Bethune forged close ties with Eleanor Roosevelt, the president's wife. When Bethune wanted to get the president's attention, all she had to do was pick up the phone and get Eleanor on the line. Bethune's relationship with the First Lady gave her additional prestige in the African American community. She was founder and president of the National Council of Negro Women (1935–1949), president of the Association for the Study of

Negro Life and History (1936–1951), and member of the Federal Council of Negro Affairs, otherwise known as Roosevelt's **Black Cabinet**.

The Black Cabinet was a group of African American advisers who had been given the job of consulting with and advising various departments of government. Bethune was called the Dean of the Black Cabinet. Young Robert C. Weaver was appointed to President Lyndon Johnson's cabinet in 1966, making him the first African American to hold a cabinet-level post in history. William H. Hastie of Howard University's law school was an adviser in the Department of the Interior. Although it did not have official authority or any real power, the Black Cabinet did represent the first time that a sitting president had decided to seek the advice of the African American community on a regular basis. In this sense, Roosevelt is credited with laying the foundation for future appointments of African Americans as heads of federal agencies.

Breaking New Ground

No single individual did as much as Eleanor Roosevelt to break down the walls of segregation during the Roosevelt Administration. The First Lady tried to represent all of the people and she had a special place in her program for the African American people. Indeed, she once flew in an airplane with a Tuskegee airman to prove to whites that it was safe to fly alongside African Americans. She would not sit in "whites only" waiting rooms or eat in "whites only" restaurants. Eleanor Roosevelt was an unusual First Lady. Pushing for equal rights and opportunities for the African American people, she made many enemies among whites. Most African Americans believed that President Roosevelt was behind the First Lady's actions, but as president he seemed more cautious, preferring to avoid political fights with his southern supporters.

African Americans and the Unions

The industrialization of the African American population was well under way when the Great Depression hit. By 1920 more than 31 percent of all African Americans gainfully employed were in manufacturing, trades, and transportation. Prior to 1910, African Americans employed in domestic service and agriculture stood at 87 percent.

Because of unionization, African Americans were not secure in their industrial jobs until they became union members. Many unions refused to allow African American members. The majority in union jobs during the depression years worked as common laborers or miners. Two unions held the largest numbers of African Americans, the Freight Handlers and the Pullman Porters, organized by A. Philip Randolph. As a rule, the unions that had the



Noted educator and founder of Bethune College, Mary McLeod Bethune, center with cane, bids farewell to her students to lead the Federal Council of Negro Affairs in President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration.



Asa Philip Randolph was another one of the geniuses of organization and mass demonstration among African Americans.

highest paying jobs excluded African Americans. In 1930, there were virtually no African American electricians or plumbers in unions, although there were more than 4,000 of them working in those trades. In 1930, there were 34,000 African American carpenters, but only 592 were members of the Carpenters and Joiners Union. There were 9,000 painters during the same period, but only 279 claimed union membership.

President Roosevelt supported the National Labor Relations Act, which guaranteed the right of workers to form unions. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) had once refused to even discuss membership of African Americans, but once the new law was passed, the AFL saw an opportunity to increase its membership and income by unionizing large numbers of unskilled African Americans. Challenged by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a new labor organization, the AFL had to fight for African American membership. The CIO recruited 210,000 African American members by 1940, just five years after it had been formed. The two unions merged in 1955.

Union organizing became a major skill for African American civil rights workers. A. Philip Randolph, who had organized the Sleeping Car Porters in 1925, became one of the most astute political organizers the African American

community had ever produced. Using his eloquence and ability to attract people to his causes, Randolph called a march on Washington in 1941 as a

"nonviolent demonstration of Negro mass power."

The aim of Randolph's demonstration was to end segregation and discrimination in government defense jobs. President Roosevelt had signed Executive Order 8802, just four days before the march, and had ordered all government agencies to bar discrimination on the basis of race, creed, or color. The Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) was established to oversee compliance with the order to end discrimination. Once again, President Roosevelt had ensured his place with the African American community, which now saw him as the best friend it had ever had in the White House.



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, center, his wife Eleanor, right, and their son James arrive at the White House on March 4, 1933. Roosevelt's New Deal policies not only helped white Americans, but held striking new promise for African Americans.



Chapter 40 After You Read

Read each section carefully, then write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Comprehension Review

1. What caused the Great Depression?
2. Why were rent parties a common occurrence in the African American community during the Great Depression?
3. Why did many African Americans shift their loyalty to the Democratic party in the election of 1932?
4. What were the three main goals of the New Deal?
5. What actions did Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., take to combat workplace discrimination?
6. What was the purpose of the Social Security Act of 1935?
7. What was the Black Cabinet?
8. How did Eleanor Roosevelt's actions support her belief of equality for all?
9. What effect did the National Labor Relations Act have on the unionization of African American workers?

Center Your Thinking

10. President Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor, recognized the need to improve the life conditions of African Americans in the United States. Take the role of the president or his wife and compose a speech calling for equal rights and opportunities for African Americans.

Vocabulary and Concept Development

1. What is a **bartering system**?
2. What does the author mean by the statement that "Franklin Roosevelt lifted the spirits of the African American people"?
3. A compound word is a term created by combining two existing words. What two terms were combined to form the word **Dixiecrat**? How is the meaning of this compound word related to the terms from which it was formed?
4. What does the term *social* refer to in "Social Security"? Was this a social act?

Reading a Timeline

Use Unit 11 and Chapter 40 timeline to complete the following:

1. Look at the chapter timeline. What kind of events are listed here? Are some of these events that applied to an emergency situation experienced by the country at large? If so, how did the government programs that started help African Americans?
2. Look at the four events listed for 1935. Does it seem to make sense that Adam Clayton Powell and Mary McLeod Bethune would organize activities and programs to serve African Americans' needs for justice, while major government assistance is given to much of the population at large? Do you think African Americans were inspired to stand up for themselves anew by the government's new activism for the whole country? Explain your answer.
3. Look at the unit timeline and compare it to the chapter timeline. What kind of period is the early to mid-1930s for African Americans, a depressing time, or an exciting time, or some combination of these?