

The New Deal:

The Genesis of a New America and The Subsequent Sin Of The Second New Deal

introduced in a suitably epic pseudo-biblical style

Note:

At the time of writing this, I lost the paper with the actual question on it. Hopefully this answers all the parts. Even if it doesn't, I hope it's an entertaining take on The New Deal. It'd make for a good movie, I think. This is what happens when a sleep deprived student loses his assignment sheet and doesn't think to email the professor at the time.

Enjoy.

I know I enjoyed writing it.
Which is rare, because I usually hate writing.

In the 1920's, there was darkness. America was without financial wealth, and the poor and unemployed ran rampant in the streets. The Great Depression was in full swing. Imagine, if you will, Satan chewing bubblegum. He reels back and blows a bubble so large that it envelopes you and POP! You are left sitting in a sticky mess. He stands back and laughs. That bubble was the economy, and that Satan was the Great Depression.

But wait, what's this?! A force of such personality rose out of the darkness that all who fell before him were struck with the undeniable desire to follow him out of said darkness. He steps into and punches Satan The Great Depression Metaphor square in the jaw! The crowd cheers, and they embrace this man as their new god.

Those who knew him called him Franklin Roosevelt, but to those who truly believed, he was called "Dr. New Deal." He unleashed such a bevy of acronyms upon the nation that they soon dominated the public vocabulary, leaving the uninformed to drown in a sea of administrations, acts, and authorities. Those who believed, however, reveled in a sort of economic paradise, with Roosevelt's Tree Of New Deal Legislation in the center.

Imagine now, on the highest branch, the biblical apple of temptation, only it's also an apple of overconfidence. The heavier the tree became with each additional piece of legislation, the more the branches drooped, and the closer Roosevelt got to the proverbial apple of overconfidence, which would eventually cause the collapse the economy yet again. Let us now examine how such a monstrous fruit could even come to exist. To do so, we must first sew the seeds of the Tree Of New Deal Legislation.

In the beginning, there was a deluge of economic reforms released at a speed that was unheard of. Within a blur of 6 days, Roosevelt had shoved no less than 4 bills down

the throat of congress, and they were too economically delicious to be ignored. If Roosevelt had been a chef, he surely would have been the greatest. But luckily for us, he wasn't, and Roosevelt's recipes instead called for a the wondrous flavors of bank holidays and bank protection legislation. The money flowed forth like sweet honey once again, and the Federal Reserve banks did rejoice. This is only the beginning of the story though. Roosevelt's economic recipe was lacking the robust savory spices of the American working class and the sweet nutrients of the American farming system.

With another onslaught of acronyms, Roosevelt's bill-writing prowess was unleashed upon the once-proud American countryside. The Agricultural Adjustment Act breathed new life into the withering fields, and bountiful harvests spread across the land once more. The once-mighty forests and parks were revitalized with the healing touch of Roosevelt's series of regional reform bills, and his treasured Civilian Conservation Corps transformed the unemployed man into a broad-shoulder woodsman for the good of the National Parks system.

But what about the industrial sector? Surely Roosevelt could not ignore the hardworking coal miner, who's face was the color of pitch but did not possess the funds to purchase a moistened towelette with which to clean himself. Roosevelt deftly provides him with enough money for literally hundreds of towelettes and maybe even some food with the grand introduction of a minimum wage of 30-40 cents. Yes, our coal miner will be living the good life now.

But all was not well, for a dark force was brewing in the depths of American populace. A group that was so dark and so menacing that noted historian Alan Brinkey, in his epic text "Unfinished Nation," was dumbfounded, describing the group as "[defying] easy ideological classification"(p. 688). I would agree. Regardless of how

they are classified though, it's obvious that these guys are pretty badass, at least according to Roosevelt.

They came from all walks of life. Dr. Francis E. Townsend raised his wrinkled, aging hand against Roosevelt and amassed a throng of 5 million, all demanding pensions for the elderly. Father Charles F. Coughlin waged a brutal radio war on poor Roosevelt, using his weekly sermons to preach about his economic opinions, which were apparently interesting enough to get a national following.

But most menacing of all was Louisiana governor Huey Long. Brinkley describes him much better than I can: “Elected governor in 1928, he launched [assaults] on his opponents so thorough and forceful that they were soon left with virtually no political power whatsoever.” (p. 688). Long's communist-style shared-wealth plan was spec'd to garner a good chunk of the vote if he were to try his hand at the presidency. Roosevelt decided that he had to act. No communist was going to end the reign of The New Dealer.

Roosevelt metaphorically ripped his shirt off Rambo-style, let out a primal yell, and threw his so-called “Second New Deal” right into Huey Long's ugly communist-esque face, along with the faces of every other dissident. But however awesome this mental image is, it is ultimately Roosevelt's Achilles heal.

The Second New Deal contained Senator Robert E. Wagner's aptly-named Wagner Act. This created yet another acronym: NLRB (National Labor Relations Board). It somehow (Brinkley doesn't say) had the power to “compel employers to recognize and bargain with legitimate unions” (p. 689). This gave the whole labor union movement a kick in the pants. Suddenly, unions had influence and could actually accomplish things.

They used this newfound power to get all cranky and demand that various

industries and companies pay attention to them. This usually involved what Brinkley calls “Labor Militancy.” While not usually violent in nature, these militant labor unions engaged in angry confrontations and, in the case of a 1935 AFL (American Federation Of Labor) convention, childish behavior. Following these angry confrontations, the various committees and unions involved splinter and reform like so many toppled building blocks rigged with C4 by various union organizers And splinters, being pointy and dangerous, are last thing Roosevelt wants in a labor union.

These pointy and dangerous labor unions are what Brinkley is talking about when he mentions “Labor Militancy.” These groups would stage sit-down strikes and refuse to work or leave the workplace, thus preventing any work from getting done. This was very bad for business, so when employees at GM staged a sit-down strike and refused to move, GM listened.

But it wasn't all about Labor Unions. Roosevelt needed to tend to the unemployed as well. The Man put his presidential knife to the bark of the Tree Of Legislation and scrawled out yet another acronym: WPA (Works Progress Administration). The WPA was the biggest of all of the work relief plans, providing for a massive amount of transportation infrastructure and with it, the jobs necessary to get the work done.

Life was good, for the most part, and Roosevelt was on top of it all. The national income had grown from \$40 billion in 1932 to \$72 billion in 1937. Roosevelt was pretty happy, as anyone would be in this situation. But he needed a way to pay for all these new acronyms he invented. He decided to try his hand at balancing the federal budget.

But something went horribly wrong. Maybe his scale wasn't calibrated, or maybe he was drunk, or misread some numbers, but whatever the reason, Roosevelt decided to cut the WPA funding in half. This had the obvious ramifications of laying off 1.5 million

workers, and several weeks later, it all fell apart. According to Brinkley, “four million additional workers lost their jobs. Economic conditions were soon almost as bad as they had been in the bleak [days before Roosevelt].” (p. 695).

So in the end, Roosevelt undid a fair amount of his work due to his overconfidence in his own economic decision-making prowess. The more successful his legislation was, the more confident he got, until it most likely went to his head and he executed what he somehow thought was a good idea at the time. He tried to redeem himself, and stuffed more requests for money down the gaping maw of Congress. It tasted bitter, but Congress complied as usual. Five billion dollars went back into the public works and relief programs, but the economy never fully recovered. And that bitter taste was left in Congress' mouth for a good long time. Yum.

From that point on, it became very difficult for Roosevelt to pass much of anything through the digestive tract of Congress, and the New Deal program was quickly overshadowed by the concern of a world crisis. Soon enough, “Dr. New Deal” would be transformed into “Dr. Win The War,” and Roosevelt's golden economic suture kit would be replaced by a much cooler silver hammer of military force. Sweet.