helping to initiate low-income housing projects. In 1972, as both his father and grandfather before him, he became pastor of Bright Hope Baptist Church in Philadelphia, where he developed a politically active ministry and continued his interest in housing and mortgage issues.

Gray was first elected to Congress from Pennsylvania’s Second District as a Democrat in 1978. During his time in Congress, he served on the House Appropriations, Foreign Affairs, and District of Columbia committees. His most important post was chairman of the House Budget Committee in 1985, from which he steered the passage of the country’s first trillion-dollar budget through controversies and differences between Congress and President Ronald Reagan.

A centrist within the Democratic Party, Gray’s primary focus in domestic policy was federal support of black private-sector development. On foreign issues he served as a leading spokesman on U.S. policy toward Africa and was a congressional sponsor of the anti-apartheid movement. Gray sponsored an emergency aid bill for Ethiopia in 1984 and helped secure passage of the Anti-Apartheid acts of 1985 and 1986, overriding presidential vetoes.

Gray’s mainstream domestic politics and energetic party politics helped pave the way for his ascendance to the Democratic leadership. In 1985 he was elected chairman of the Democratic caucus in the House, and in 1989 he became majority whip, the number three leadership position in the House and the highest rank held by an African-American congressman at that time.

In 1991 Gray resigned from Congress to become president of United Negro College Fund (UNCF) in New York City. That year he oversaw the inauguration of the UNCF’s Campaign 2000, a drive to raise $250 million by the year 2000. With the support of President George H. W. Bush and a $50 million gift from media magnate Walter Annenberg, the campaign raised $86 million in its first year. In May 1994, Gray was named temporary envoy to Haiti by President Bill Clinton but retained his position at the UNCF.

In 2003, after transforming the UNCF into a powerful philanthropic organization, Gray stepped down as president to spend more time with his family.

See also Politics in the United States, United Negro College Fund

*Bibliography*


Updated by publisher 2005
A young girl looks out from a newspaper-lined window in her log cabin home in Gee's Bend, Alabama, 1937. The widespread impoverishment caused throughout the United States by the Great Depression of the 1930s brought about a further decline in living standards for many southern blacks.

The widespread impoverishment caused throughout the United States by the Great Depression of the 1930s brought about a further decline in living standards for many southern blacks. The Library of Congress.

quick temporary measures to alleviate the economic distress experienced by the unemployed and to stimulate the private sector of the economy. This legislation seemed, at first, to be promising to the African-American population. Programs in Roosevelt’s plan—known as the New Deal—that were of special interest to blacks included the National Recovery Administration (NRA), the Agriculture Adjustment Administration (AAA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Civil Works Administration (CWA)—all federal programs created in 1933. In addition, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) provided federal funds to the states to enable them to provide relief and work relief to the poor. This was the first federal program to give direct grants to the states; it included incentives that encouraged states to improve public-assistance policies.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the National Youth Administration (NYA) were created in 1935. The WPA provided work relief to those out of work but employable; meanwhile, FERA was phased out, giving the responsibility for providing public assistance back to the states. The NYA provided work relief for young people living at home or attending college.

In addition, significant New Deal reform legislation was enacted during the Great Depression that was of great concern to African Americans. This included the Social Security Act of 1935, a watershed in social-welfare policy, which established old-age and unemployment insurance administered by the federal government and categorical relief programs administered by the states; the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which gave considerable power to organized labor by guaranteeing the right of workers to organize on their own behalf without interference from employers; and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which established a minimum wage and maximum hours of work.
National Industrial Recovery Act

The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of 1933 was an omnibus act designed to stimulate the private-sector economy, relieve economic distress, and resolve conflicts between labor and management. African Americans believed that the NIRA had the potential to be very helpful. Several black organizations, including the National Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), tried unsuccessfully to have an antidiscrimination amendment attached to it. The NIRA created the National Recovery Administration (NRA), and one of its immediate tasks was to establish industrial codes with minimum-wage rates and maximum hours of work in all industries, an anti-inflationary measure meant to control a wage-price spiral. The first problem that African Americans encountered in this program was the exclusion of domestic and agricultural workers from coverage. This meant that for two-thirds of the black workforce, there was very little hope of receiving any increase in wages or improvement in working conditions.

Furthermore, during the process of establishing codes, it became apparent that industries were submitting codes that amounted, in effect, to differential wages in occupations with a majority of black workers. The proposed wages for these occupations were 20 percent to 40 percent lower than the wages in occupations whose workers were predominantly white. When Roosevelt issued a blanket "blue eagle" agreement to promote support of the codes, it caused widespread displacement of black workers, especially in the South, where employers refused to pay a minimum wage to them. In order to counteract these policies, the Joint Committee on National Recovery was founded, composed of twenty-two national African-American fraternal, civic, and church groups. The Joint Committee, chaired by John P. Davis and Robert Weaver (1907–1997), closely monitored the establishment of codes in all industries where there were a substantial number of black workers, and they submitted briefs against a different wage rate based on geographic areas.

Section 7A of the NIRA gave workers the right to organize and bargain collectively without interference from employers. Organized labor was able to use section 7A to expand its membership and help workers take advantage of collective bargaining, particularly in the coal industry and needle trades. Some African Americans had reservations about this policy, not because they were against the principle of collective bargaining, which they saw as very positive, but because of the policies of local unions that prevented blacks from becoming part of the organized labor movement.

Workplace Discrimination

African-American organizations, especially the National Urban League and the NAACP, pressured the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to abolish segregation and discrimination, but these practices continued. As labor gained more control over jobs in New Deal work programs, more black workers were denied jobs because they were not union members. The Joint Committee, along with National Urban League officials Eugene Kirkle Jones and T. Arnold Hill and NAACP executive secretary Walter White, argued that this was a violation of the NRA codes, but discrimination continued. In 1935, when the Supreme Court ruled that the NRA’s regulation of the private sector was unconstitutional, African Americans did not regard this as a significant loss.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) was established to alleviate the problems associated with depressed prices for farm products and mounting crop surpluses. The AAA had a decentralized administration that gave a great deal of power to local areas. In spite of clear federal guidelines as to how benefits were to be allocated between owner and tenant, there were great variations in the treatment of black sharecroppers—people who lived and farmed on land that was owned by another person and shared their earnings, based on acreage and production, with the landowner.

Too frequently, large landowners controlled the AAA benefits (incentives to reduce cotton acreage), and tenant farmers and sharecroppers were not given fair shares. The Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union, an interracial organization, was formed to fight for fair treatment under the AAA and received considerable support from the NAACP. But it was difficult for these organizations to compete with the southern bloc of the Democratic Party in Congress, and little was accomplished. The AAA was replaced by the Soil Conservation Act and the Domestic Allotment Act when, in 1936, the Supreme Court ruled that the AAA’s processing tax was unconstitutional.

The Civilian Conservation Corps

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of the most enduring and popular New Deal work-relief programs, lasting until the 1940s. It served three purposes: (1) it provided relief to young men and their families; (2) it removed young people from the private labor market; and (3) it provided basic education and job training. The young men lived in CCC camps run by the War Depart-
The Great Depression of the 1930s brought about a further decline in living standards for many southern blacks in the United States. While the average yearly household income in the United States was $1,500 at that time, a study of sharecroppers in four Southern states found their average income to be $294 annually. 

African Americans did not have equal access to this program. Although it was federally financed and administered, local social-service staffs selected participants. In some areas, this resulted in the exclusion of African-American youths. Since the camps were administered by the War Department, the segregated policies of the armed forces were often followed. In addition, there was a racial quota that limited the number of black youth according to the proportion of blacks in the population.

Furthermore, the camps did not hire black personnel. Through pressure brought to bear by such African-American organizations as the National Urban League and the NAACP, some of these policies were changed. All-black camps were set up in areas where segregation was the law of the land; in other areas, the camps were integrated. Some black reserve officers were placed at all-black camps. In spite of these changes, local autonomy and quotas continued to limit the participation of African Americans.

The Public Works Administration

The intent of the Public Works Administration in the Department of the Interior was to stimulate industry through the purchase of materials and wage payments. The program was designed to construct large projects such as dams, government buildings, and low-rent housing. It was a federal employment program that paid set wages based on levels of skill and prevailing wages in local areas. Federal administration was more likely to ensure that African-American workers would be treated fairly, but projects were awarded to local contractors, who then negotiated with organized labor for the selection of workers. This resulted in the exclusion of many black workers because local AFL craft unions did not admit blacks, and there was no enforcement against discrimination.
Robert Weaver, special adviser for Negro affairs in the Department of the Interior, proposed a plan to correct this situation based on the percentage of skilled and unskilled African-American workers in each of the cities involved in low-rent-housing construction. Eighteen months after the plan had been implemented, Weaver expressed the belief that it had helped to overcome discrimination against black workers. Unfortunately, the plan was never extended to other PWA projects or other New Deal programs.

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration

The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) was a relief and work-relief program administered by the states through federal grants. Designed as a temporary program to meet emergency needs, it had many attributes that promised to be helpful to African-American workers. It provided jobs with a specific wage rate based on skill; there was no racial quota; it had a white-collar component that provided work for black professionals; it funded self-help projects; and federal regulations attached to the program raised relief standards and discouraged discrimination. FERA also established eligibility with means testing (i.e., one’s income had to be below a set amount so that one could qualify for benefits), which ensured that those most in need would be given priority.

But there was no rule to enforce nondiscrimination. Since eligibility was established locally, local prejudices prevailed, making it difficult for African Americans to participate. It was therefore easier for them to get relief than to obtain work on FERA projects. FERA’s wage rates were established according to geographic zones and were disliked by many employers, who thought the rates increased labor costs. A great deal of pressure to rescind or lower the wage rates came from the southern states, where the rates were lower than those in the private sector and with geographic differentiations. The states in the Southeast, where the majority of African Americans lived, had the lowest wage rates.

The National Youth Administration

The National Youth Administration (NYA) was established in 1933 to help young men and women who were living at home. It helped those young people who were not attending school to receive job training and those in school to continue their education. African-American youth fared fairly well under the NYA, in spite of a great deal of local autonomy in the administration of the programs. This relative success may have been the result of the influence of Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955), the head of the Negro Affairs section of the NYA, who was able to funnel thousands of dollars to black youths.

The Works Progress Administration

New Deal administrators began to fear that FERA was creating a permanent dependent class. There was a general consensus that relief for the able-bodied unemployed should be in the form of work relief. Thus, FERA was dismantled in 1935 and the Works Progress Administration (WPA; later called the Work Projects Administration) was established to serve as a coordinating agency for work-relief programs in the states. Instead, however, it became a giant work-relief program itself, assuming responsibility for providing work to over three and a half million people and emphasizing the desirability of work over relief. Responsibility for providing relief was returned to the states, many of which reverted to “poor-law standards” that had been in place prior to FERA.

After the experiences that African Americans had had with earlier New Deal programs, they regarded the WPA very cautiously. It had attributes that appeared to be helpful, such as federal administration, an emphasis on work, a white-collar component, and set wage rates, and it gave preference to those most in need by establishing eligibility with means testing.

But the WPA also had policies that were disturbing to the black population, including wage rates that were lower than those in the private sector and with geographic differentiations. The states in the Southeast, where the majority of African Americans lived, had the lowest wage rate...
African-American sharecropper working with one-horse plow, Georgia, 1937. Most African Americans became sharecroppers out of necessity, providing their own labor and depending on credit for everything from animals and equipment to food and other necessities. Photograph by Dorothea Lange.

Most African Americans became sharecroppers out of necessity, providing their own labor and depending on credit for everything from animals and equipment to food and other necessities. Although discrimination was forbidden, there was no enforcement mechanism to prevent it. The WPA was a federal program, but most of the projects were developed at the local level and gave a great deal of control to local officials. Organized labor again controlled hiring on many of the projects.

Since the WPA was not allowed to compete with private industry, and because the cost of materials was to be kept to a minimum, many of its jobs were regarded as make-work assignments, and thus of very little value. Harry Hopkins, the administrator of the WPA, was creative in his development of projects and actually accomplished a great deal—the program built or improved hospitals, schools, farm-to-market roads, playgrounds, and landing strips. The white-collar component proved especially beneficial to African-American professionals. Hopkins created the WPA Federal Theatre Project, which presented plays and dances for children and adults, many of whom had never seen a live theatrical production. The WPA Federal Writers’ Project resulted in the development of numerous brochures, guides, and other publications, such as the Life in America series, which included ethnic studies such as The Negro in Virginia. The Federal Arts Project gave jobs to unemployed artists, who taught at community centers, produced artistic works, and painted murals in government buildings. Many African-American actors, writers, and artists were employed in these WPA projects. Charles White (1918–1979) and Hale Woodruff (1900–1980), for example, were accomplished artists who taught in WPA programs in the South.
As the private sector expanded, WPA policies became more restrictive. Workers could not remain on projects longer than eighteen months. This was especially hard on black workers because the private labor market was not absorbing them as quickly as it was absorbing whites. The WPA was curtailed sharply in 1940, although over eight million people remained unemployed. These individuals were forced to return to relief for help.

The National Urban League and the NAACP thought it imperative for African Americans to be gainfully employed, and they advocated some kind of permanent public-works program to provide jobs for those workers who could not find employment in the private sector. They predicted that a large proportion of African Americans would become permanently dependent on relief without a work program to help them remain employed. They also recognized that the WPA was costly and had its faults, but they thought that it was worth the price in the human dignity and self-respect that regular employment provided.

Social Welfare Legislation

In addition to creating temporary programs to alleviate the economic distress and stimulate the private-sector economy, the New Deal produced some permanent, significant social-welfare legislation. Legislation of the greatest concern to African Americans included the National Labor Relations Act and the Social Security Act, both in 1935, and the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938.

The National Labor Relations Act. The National Labor Relations Act had its beginning with section 7A of the NIRA. When the NRA was ruled unconstitutional, many of the policies in section 7A were transferred to a labor bill that was introduced by Senator Robert Wagner of New York in 1935. African Americans were especially concerned about a clause stating that “the employer and a labor organization may agree that an applicant for employment shall be required to join a labor organization as a condition of employment.” They feared that this clause would have very negative consequences for black workers because it seemed to legalize closed shops. If this was to be the law, the African-American population believed it was mandatory to have a mechanism to prevent unions from discriminating against black workers.

T. Arnold Hill, the industrial secretary of the National Urban League, testified against Wagner’s labor bill, prefacing his testimony with a statement supporting the labor movement and the concept of collective bargaining. The crux of his testimony was that the league could not support the bill as written because it permitted closed shops, denied black workers the right to engage in strikebreaking in occupations where they were also prohibited from joining the striking union, and failed to protect them from racial discrimination by labor unions.

Wagner was very much aware of the discriminatory practices of organized labor, but he was reluctant to include any kind of antidiscrimination clause in the labor bill because he thought this would jeopardize its passage. In the end, the bill was passed without such a clause. This issue continued to be a major concern among blacks, however, and enforcement against employment discrimination was finally accomplished with Title 7 of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The Social Security Act. The Social Security Act established federal responsibility for a broad range of social-welfare programs to help individuals meet the loss of earnings or absence of income caused by unemployment, old age, death of a family’s wage earner, and other hazards of life. The initial act provided old-age insurance, unemployment compensation, aid to destitute blind and elderly persons, and aid to destitute children in one-parent families. In 1939 the act was amended to include survivors’ insurance.

This act was of special importance to President Roosevelt, whose primary concerns were old-age security and unemployment insurance. He insisted on worker contributions, because he thought this would make old-age insurance different from relief and ensure the permanence of these programs. Benefits would be regarded as a right by those who had contributed through the social security payroll tax, and the programs would be viewed as self-supporting. This would make it less likely for Congress, in later years, to dismantle them.

The Social Security Act has had a lasting and profound effect on African Americans because it created a two-tier social-welfare system. The first, and preferred, tier is a system to which workers and/or their employers contribute (old-age and survivors’ insurance and unemployment compensation). The second tier is a stigmatized system that consists of public-assistance programs (aid to the poor elderly, the blind, and dependent children).

African-American organizations closely monitored the debates leading to the passage of the Social Security Act. The three issues that were of most concern to them were administrative responsibility, coverage, and methods of financing. They preferred federal administration of all programs, universal coverage, and financing by a means other than worker contributions. The original bill covered all workers, but the Treasury Department objected because of the difficulties involved in collecting a payroll tax from agricultural and domestic workers; they were thus
excluded from coverage under the first tier. This exclusion may have been for political reasons also, since it was anticipated that farmers, especially in the South, would have strong objections to contributing to social insurance benefits for black farm laborers and would fight against passage of the bill.

African Americans testified while the bill was being debated in Congress, advocating the inclusion of domestic and agricultural workers, federal administration of all programs, and financing through general revenues. The exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers under the first tier meant that about two-thirds of the black workforce would not be eligible for old-age insurance or unemployment compensation. Such people would have to rely on public assistance when they were unable to support themselves by working. The act gave the states the administrative responsibility for public-assistance programs under the second tier, something that was especially difficult for the African-American population in the Southeast.

Local autonomy meant that many black individuals and families who were eligible for old-age assistance, blind assistance, or aid to dependent children would be denied it by local agencies with discriminatory policies. Many would be forced to work in the cotton fields without the protection of any labor statutes.

African Americans paid very little attention to the public-assistance components of the act. Their main concern were the programs tied to employment. The NAACP and the National Urban League pointed out that relief rolls were no substitute; relief was a dole that stigmatized and robbed an individual of self-respect and initiative. These organizations continued to try to amend the act to provide coverage for agricultural and domestic workers under the first tier.

**The Fair Labor Standards Act.** The Fair Labor Standards Act established a minimum wage and maximum hours of work. As with the NLRA, many aspects of this act
had been part of the code policies under the National Recovery Administration. The African-American population was generally in favor of the bill, although geographic wage differentials were seriously considered and it was quite likely that agricultural and domestic workers would once again be excluded. The National Urban League favored the bill but decided not to support it openly because of the likelihood of a racist backlash. The NAACP attempted to ally with the AFL, hoping that such an alliance would result in the inclusion of agricultural and domestic workers, but the AFL did not join it on this issue.

The bill barely passed because it had no strong backing from any group; indeed, it might never have been reported out of committee if Senator Claude Pepper, who supported it, had not won a senatorial primary in Florida over a congressman who campaigned against the bill. It was then brought to the floor and quickly passed.

The Fair Labor Standards Act was very weak because too many concessions had been given to diverse groups to ensure its passage. This meant that several occupations had been excluded from coverage, including domestic and agricultural workers. It left the differential wage question to the administrator of the law. This eventually resulted in a federal set wage of 25 cents per hour and a maximum workweek of 44 hours; after two years, industry would reach a minimum wage of 40 cents and a 40-hour maximum workweek.

**African Americans in the Government**

The New Deal administration was the first to include a substantial number of African Americans. Several black leaders served as advisers for Negro affairs in the various cabinet departments—a group frequently referred to as the “black cabinet” or the “black brain trust.” Some of the prominent appointees were Robert Weaver, Mary McLeod Bethune, William Hastie, Forrester Washington, Eugene Kinkele Jones, and Robert Vann. Historians are not in agreement regarding the amount of influence this group exercised. Black advisers were able to expand employment opportunities for black professionals in civil-service positions and perhaps, from time to time, focus some attention on civil rights. But for the most part, the black cabinet was not a cohesive group and never made any strong policy statements.

Advisers for Negro affairs were seldom involved in the formulation of policy. However, it is clear that the presence of such advisers was a positive force. Robert Weaver was able to devise policies that helped more black workers gain jobs under the PWA. Mary McLeod Bethune, head of the Negro Affairs section of the NYA, was a highly respected woman who was able to help thousands of black youths take advantage of NYA benefits. In addition, Bethune had a close relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt and explained the needs, concerns, and aspirations of the African-American population to her. Mrs. Roosevelt, as the president’s wife, was perceived by the black community as a friend who was willing to intervene and be an advocate for them. She was sympathetic to the plight of African Americans but, like the president, did not believe that the government could eliminate racial obstacles.

**African-American Organizations**

The leadership that was most helpful to African Americans came from outside the administration, in the form of black organizations such as the National Urban League and the NAACP. These groups attempted to monitor the development of New Deal legislation and programs, to testify in favor of certain policies, to keep the African-American population abreast of New Deal initiatives, and to help them take advantage of the programs. These organizations frequently made attempts to mobilize the African-American population to support or fight against certain legislation. However, they were not very successful in persuading Congress to support policies that would have been more helpful to African Americans. This was largely due to a lack of political power.

**The Switch to the Democratic Party**

Most African Americans who voted in 1932 were loyal to the Republican Party, the party believed to be responsible for the emancipation of the slaves. By 1936, however, most of the voting black population had switched their loyalties to the Democrats. This switch occurred in spite of the fact that the Democratic Party paid very little attention to the needs of blacks. The party tended to be beholden to its southern bloc, which was adamantly racist and against the federal government’s exercising authority in matters traditionally left to the states. This meant, of course, that the southern states would be able to continue their segregation laws and patterns.

Yet New Deal legislation had the potential to provide more for blacks than had any recent Republican administration. It did provide at least a segment of the black population with public-works jobs and with relief. There was an effort in at least some of the New Deal programs to prevent discrimination on the basis of race. More than any previous administration, it appointed African Americans to meaningful positions. These events appear to be a plausible explanation for the switch from the “party of Lincoln” to the Democratic Party.
Even though most African Americans made this switch in 1936, they continued to lack the political clout needed to influence New Deal legislation, mostly because the largest proportion of the black population was in the South and disfranchised. Blacks in the South lived under a repressive political system; fear of lynching made it difficult to mobilize any southern protest movement. Throughout the 1930s, the NAACP strongly advocated legislation that would make lynching a federal crime, but its attempts were never supported by New Deal administrators. Nor did the New Deal support the NAACP's efforts to eliminate the poll tax in southern states, a tax designed to disfranchise the black population.

Throughout the Depression, New Deal legislation had to meet a litmus test that would ensure the support of the southern bloc of the party. This was to the detriment of African-American workers because, too often, legislation was enacted with policies that limited their access to programs and entitlements. In 1940, as the WPA was dismantled, a substantial portion of the black population remained unemployed and on relief, and no significant change had occurred in discriminatory employment practices. Thus, the New Deal did not become the panacea the African-American population had hoped it would.

See also Bethune, Mary McLeod; Federal Writers’ Project; Labor and Labor Unions; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); National Urban League; Weaver, Robert Clifton; White, Walter Francis; Woodruff, Hale

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**GREAT MIGRATION, THE**

See Migration/Population, U.S.

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**GREEN, AL**

April 13, 1946

Singer and songwriter Albert Leomnes Green was born in Forrest City, Arkansas, where at age nine he began singing in a family gospel quartet called the Green Brothers. For six years the group toured gospel circuits, first in the South and then in the Midwest when the family relocated to Grand Rapids, Michigan, first recording in 1960. Green formed his own pop group, Al Green and the Creations, in 1964 after his father expelled him from the gospel quartet for listening to what he called the “profane music” of singer Jackie Wilson. The group toured for three years before changing their name in 1967 to Al Green and the Soulmates (the e was briefly added to Green’s name for commercial reasons). That year Green made his record debut with the single “Back Up Train,” which went to number five on the national soul charts in 1968. However, there were no follow-up successes, and Green was plunged back into obscurity, playing small clubs again.


At the height of his career, Green began to reconsider his pop music orientation and shifted back toward gospel music. A turning point was an incident in 1974 in which his girlfriend scalded him with a pot of boiling grits before killing herself with his gun. When Green recovered from his burns, he became a minister, and in 1976 he purchased a church in Memphis and was ordained pastor of the Full Gospel Tabernacle, where he would perform services near-