

# **The P in WPA. A Critical Evaluation of the Works Progress Administration**

Proseminararbeit zur Veranstaltung

## **Topics in US History: From Reconstruction to World War II**

Wintersemester 2003/2004

Dozent: Dr. Thomas Clark

**Lehrstuhl Geschichte Nordamerikas und Großbritanniens**

**Universität Kassel**

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## 1. Introduction

The period between 1929 and 1945, spanning from “Black Friday” to the end of World War II, is seen by many historians as the most important period in American history, rivaled only by the American Revolution and the Civil War.<sup>1</sup> As the war was a caesura in American foreign politics, it is generally accepted that Franklin D. Roosevelt’s response to the Great Depression was a caesura in domestic politics. The New Deal has become a synonym for bold state intervention, liberal welfare-policies, and revolutionary ideas in arts and culture. This popular view of the 1930’s as a decade of fundamental change is held by directors of Hollywood movies<sup>2</sup> as well as authors of textbooks,<sup>3</sup> thereby further contributing to a popular myth.

Kommentar: Establishing the relevance of the subject matter

This paper will focus on the measures to fight unemployment in general and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in particular, trying to answer the question of how new the New Deal actually was. Was the WPA in fact a revolution in American social policies or rather a continuation of traditional means? Did the Roosevelt Administration intend to fundamentally alter federal response to unemployment or did it just react to an explosive social climate? Was the WPA a first step towards communism, as some conservatives feared, or – as pointed out in this paper – deeply rooted in traditional American values?

Kommentar: Introduction and precise definition of topic: unemployment measures of the New Deal > particularly in the WPA  
introduction of the thesis question: how new were the measures taken within the WPA?  
additional explanation, ^definition of “newness”, contextualization: “new” meaning “revolution in social policies” as against “traditional policies;”  
first mention of thesis: New Deal policy not new but “deeply rooted in traditional values”

Despite this seemingly unchallenged popular image of the New Deal, economists, sociologists, and art-historians alike have pointed out the limited scope of the WPA. In the economic debate, Keynesians have attributed the failure of the WPA to significantly reduce unemployment to the fact that the New Deal was not accompanied by a real change in fiscal policies.<sup>4</sup> In addition, social reformers have emphasized the limits of the WPA in the debate about contemporary

Kommentar: arguments from scholarship in different disciplines supporting thesis. The paper is frequently puts its argument in the context of academic debates over the nature of the New Deal!

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<sup>1</sup> Detlef Junker, “Weltwirtschaftskrise, New Deal, Zweiter Weltkrieg,” in *Länderbericht USA*, ed. W. P. Adams and P. Lösche (Frankfurt: Campus, 1998), 121.

<sup>2</sup> *The Cradle will Rock*, dir. Tim Robbins, 137 min., Buena Vista Pictures, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Gerald D. Nash, *The Crucial Era* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1992) or Tom H. Watkins, *The Great Depression* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> P. Fearon, “Hoover, Roosevelt and American Economic Policy during the 1930s,” in *Capitalism in Crisis: International Responses to the Great Depression*, ed. W. R. Garside (London: Pinter, 1993), 141.

welfare.<sup>5</sup> The idea that the art projects of the WPA sparked political radicalism or were itself a result of such has recently been rejected by art-historians.<sup>6</sup>

Critically looking at the WPA, the approach of this paper is to show that the New Deal was in fact not so new. As many other New Deal measures did, the WPA continued and even cut back existing programs, and it was more likely the result of uproar on the streets than of political radicalism in the White House, which will be shown in chapter 2. Chapter 3 will illustrate how the WPA confirmed American values rather than subverting them.

**Kommentar:** full thesis statement:  
1. makes a precise claim  
2. is relevant, because it challenges a wide-spread interpretation of the New Deal  
3. the author chooses the WPA as a case study for the traditional nature of the new deal, instead of talking about the entire New Deal, which would be too broad a topic for a 15-page paper.

## 2. Tradition in Hard Times: The WPA in Context

### 2.1. Between Work and Welfare: Unemployment before 1930

Although it is probably right to say that the American people were surprised by the severity of the Great Depression,<sup>7</sup> unemployment was by no means new to Americans, neither was the idea that “public authorities had a special responsibility to help able-bodied people get jobs.”<sup>8</sup> Already during the recession of the 1850s wide-spread demands for public works and social relief were answered by local governments with modest public works programs. In every recession since then Massachusetts unionists demanded direct aid for the unemployed from the government. The depression of the 1890s and the recession of 1913-1915 even caused the national AFL to demand public works from the federal government.

**Kommentar:** establishes historical precedent: there is a history of demands for aid to the unemployed

A poll conducted in 1935 reported that three-fourth of the public believed that the government should give a job to anyone who wants one.<sup>9</sup> The conservative argument that social-welfare activities do not comply with the so called “American values” of self-reliance and hard-work is therefore wrong. “From the nineteenth century to the present, many Americans have called upon the government to fight

**Kommentar:** “conservative” counter-argument is disproved

<sup>5</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Social Policy in the United States. Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 209.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Nate, *Amerikanische Träume. Die Kultur der Vereinigten Staaten in der Zeit des New Deal* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2003), 100.

<sup>7</sup> Fearon, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Skocpol, 234.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

unemployment by using a variety of direct and indirect means to generate jobs for those who need work.”<sup>10</sup>

It is important, though, to distinguish between simple welfare handouts for the poor and the government's responsibility to ensure employment. The emphasis of New Deal measures and especially of the WPA was on the latter. Thus, the WPA was not a fundamental break with “American values” but in accordance with the overwhelming majority of the Americans (see also chapter 3.1 for a discussion on public works and American values). It should be remembered, though, that before the Great Depression relief came either from private charities or from local governments. It was the severity of that crisis that forced the federal government to respond.

**Kommentar:** differentiation: welfare and job creation not the same; job creation, which WPA represented, has traditional roots in American thought and policy  
qualification of argument: Federal involvement, rather than private or state level action, represents a new dimension

## 2.2 American Dream Deferred: The Great Depression

It is impossible to look at the WPA without looking at the human toll of the Great Depression, the biggest economic crisis in the history of the United States. The USA was one of the most heavily affected countries of this world-wide recession. The number of companies that went bankrupt rose from 22,000 in 1929, to 26,000 in 1930. In 1931 this number was 28,000, reaching 31,000 bankruptcies in 1932.<sup>11</sup> However, “the most serious socio-economic problem to emerge after 1929 was unemployment.”<sup>12</sup> In late 1932, the worst point of the depression, about 25% of the Americans were unemployed. In certain regions and among certain groups in society unemployment was much higher, reaching as much as 80% in Toledo.<sup>13</sup>

**Kommentar:** connects to previous paragraph by illustrating the material and psychological severity of the depression, which demanded Federal action. This chapter establishes the general conservatism of the early New Deal, presenting numerous arguments proving that FDR's followed traditional and established policy concepts.

These economic facts, however, do not tell anything about the human suffering during this period and the general feeling of hopelessness and despair. The American dream seemed to be fundamentally shattered and so was the trust in the government and the economic system. Reports from social workers give a grim account of that time, talking about the unemployed: “They are apathetic, sinking

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>11</sup> Junker, 124.

<sup>12</sup> Fearon, 114.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Boyer, ed., *The Enduring Vision* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 735.

into resigned bitterness . . . they don't believe in man or God, let alone private industry. The only thing that keeps them from suicide is this amazing loss of vitality."<sup>14</sup> Although the unemployed were a minority, it is generally accepted that they had a disproportionate share in carrying the burden of the depression.

There is, however, a controversy regarding the social and political pressure caused by the unemployed. John A. Garraty argues that "protests of the jobless were sporadic,"<sup>15</sup> and that "the jobless displayed toward political issues the same apathy that characterized their whole lives."<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Congressman Hamilton Fish told the House of Representatives that "if we don't give [security] under the existing system, the people will change the system. Make no mistake about that."<sup>17</sup> It may be appropriate to conclude that, while the unemployed were a far cry from being the revolutionary factor in society, "the Depression seemed to choose its victims blindly [...] Few could feel safe while the plague raged and therefore it struck fear in nearly every heart, but those seriously touched remained a minority."<sup>18</sup>

In 1934 this fear found expression in about two thousand strikes, some of them led by Communists, including such diverse parts of society as New York taxi-drivers and San Francisco dock-workers.<sup>19</sup> The WPA like most other New Deal projects was, therefore, not a well intended project to transform America into a welfare-state. Instead, Roosevelt's "braintrust" merely reacted to an economic and political crisis of unprecedented severity. Consequently, the WPA was just an attempt "to reorganize capitalism in such a way as to overcome the crisis and stabilize the system; also, to head off the alarming growth of spontaneous rebellion."<sup>20</sup> This again shows that it was not the WPA or

**Kommentar:** qualification: reflection of scholarly disputes about pressure created by poor and unemployed, forcing government action. Evidence given to refute Garraty

**Kommentar:** conclusion: the fact that FDR was reacting under massive pressure indicates his programs were not revolutionary initiatives but attempts at preventing a perceived danger of rebellion from below.

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in: James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle against Poverty 1900-1994*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 51.

<sup>15</sup> John A. Garraty, "Unemployment during the Great Depression", in: *The New Deal. Conflicting Interpretations and Shifting Perspectives*, ed. M. Dubofsky (New York: Garland, 1992), 188.

<sup>16</sup> Garraty, 189.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in: Nancy E. Rose, *Put to Work. Relief Programs in the Great Depression* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1994), 22.

<sup>18</sup> Garraty, 174.

<sup>19</sup> Boyer, 722.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Harper, 1995), 383.

other measures of the New Deal that were new, but the economic crisis that led to those measures.

## 2.2 Hoover's Failure, Roosevelt's Success?

The view of President Hoover as being unable and unwilling to respond adequately to the Great Depression has only recently been restored, at least partially. Hoover initially regarded unemployment as a local issue and urged municipalities to create public works projects. In 1930 he set up the Emergency Committee for Unemployment, aimed at encouraging private industry to provide jobs. Since there were only few jobs to provide, the committee was replaced by the President's Organization on Unemployment Relief in 1931, an unsuccessful attempt of fundraising to aid the poor. As a result of these quite pitiful responses to unemployment, Hoover launched the Emergency Relief and Construction Act, providing about \$30 million in loans to the states. In July 1932 Hoover authorized the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) to give \$2 billion to states and municipalities for public works programs.

Although this seems to be only "a drop in the bucket" <sup>21</sup> compared to the billions that followed under the WPA, it is important to remember that "Hoover took a series of steps that added up to an unprecedented federal response to economic crisis." <sup>22</sup> Roosevelt, then, rather continued a policy that Hoover already started. As most industrial countries did even for years after 1933, Hoover and the early Roosevelt Administration "placed a higher value on balancing the budgets and preventing inflation than on increasing the number of jobs." <sup>23</sup> Also, the so called turbulent "Hundred Days" after Roosevelt's election for president were deeply rooted in the progressive Era, World War I, and the Hoover Presidency. <sup>24</sup>

The predecessors of the WPA during the early New Deal were the Public Works Administration (PWA), the Tennessee Valley Authority

**Kommentar:** Next argument supporting thesis: Roosevelt continued Hoover policies, though on a larger scale. Thus they cannot be considered new and revolutionary.

**Kommentar:** Further arguments: conservative budget-balancing policy (no deficit-spending), roots in the Progressive Era.

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<sup>21</sup> Rose, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Boyer, 713.

<sup>23</sup> Garraty, 193.

<sup>24</sup> Boyer, 716.

(TVA), and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). All these programs were aimed primarily at white men; women were excluded and access for African Americans was severely restricted. Another important program of the first “Hundred Days” was the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA). It had two main goals: One was to counteract the belief that receiving aid was shameful, and the other was to restore the work ethic of the unemployed. However, eligibility was based on need, which means that applicants had to pass a degrading “means test” – an investigation of the family by a social worker. Women and African Americans were also treated as second-class citizens.<sup>25</sup> FERA also tried to combine the conflicting ideas of paying wages according to the work performed, while simultaneously respecting the individual need of the family. These early programs then were quite cautious steps to respond to the crisis of unemployment, while keeping a balanced budget and, more importantly, sticking to the American ideas of individualism and private enterprise (these points will be further discussed in the next two chapters).

**Kommentar:** Further indications of conservative nature of early New Deal

One more program should be mentioned here since it was the most daring step towards ‘real’ public employment as opposed to simple work relief: the Civil Works Administration (CWA). The CWA was launched in November 1933 with almost one fourth of the labor force still unemployed, facing a harsh winter. Although the CWA provided work for more people at one time than any other work program in the U.S., it was not the scope that made it distinct from other programs, especially the WPA.<sup>26</sup> The CWA proved the viability of a program that did not include means tests, investigations by social-workers, and noncompetitive work projects. As we will see, the Roosevelt Administration’s own conservatism led to the cancellation of this unprecedented public works program. The WPA then was only the conservative response to the CWA.

**Kommentar:** further argument supporting thesis: a potentially innovative program was cancelled, proving the conservatism of FDR’s approaches

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<sup>25</sup> Rose, 32.

<sup>26</sup> William W. Bremer, “Along the ‘American Way’: The New Deal’s Work Relief Programs for the Unemployed”, in: *The New Deal. Conflicting Interpretations and Shifting Perspectives*, ed. M. Dubofsky (New York: Garland, 1992), 213.

### 3. Typically American? The WPA and Conservatism

**Kommentar:** main part: analysis of the conservative nature of the WPA from three perspectives

#### 3.1 “Brother Can You Spare a Job?”

The Report of the Committee on Economic Security (January 1935) regarded “work as preferable to other forms of relief where possible [...]. Public funds should be devoted to providing work rather than relief.”<sup>27</sup> This statement expresses the guiding principle of welfare for the unemployed in the United States. Whereas there may be a political controversy about welfare in general, “both conservatives and liberals generally agree on the need for mandatory work programs: that welfare recipients should be forced to work at some job in order to prove they deserve aid.”<sup>28</sup> It may be right to say that a political cartoon of that time saying: “No, keep the dime. But brother, could you spare a job?” expresses best both the general attitude of the unemployed, as well as of the American public and policy makers.<sup>29</sup>

**Kommentar:** WPA stands firmly in the tradition described in ch. 2

Theda Skocpol argues that the conservative argument that American values would rule out social welfare activities is only one possible reading of American culture.<sup>30</sup> Although one may regard the idea of getting ahead through self-reliance and hard work as an American value (if we can talk about such things as “American values” without stereotyping), the WPA did not contradict these values. Work relief was seen as the “American Way” of welfare “because it made public assistance something earned by work, not granted by charity, and because it thereby infused symbols of respectability into the stream of relief.”<sup>31</sup>

**Kommentar:** Arguments from secondary literature

If self-help and individual initiative were regarded as part of the American tradition, employment programs that utilized the skills of the people, compensated workers according to the value of their labor, guaranteed regular incomes, and insured personal autonomy would have been programs in this “American tradition”. The concept of work-relief, then, “derived from values inherent in a capitalistic ethos.”<sup>32</sup>

**Kommentar:** Work relief as combination of welfare with American-capitalist work ethic

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in: Skocpol, 230.

<sup>28</sup> Rose, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Skocpol, 229.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 234.

<sup>31</sup> Bremer, 202.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Despite the complaints from conservatives, "the history of work relief serves as a case study for their [the New Dealers'] acceptance of capitalism and their proclivity to innovate within the confines of the capitalistic order."<sup>33</sup>

The CWA, in its attempt to preserve the capitalistic ethos in public employment, eventually collided with the need to keep the capitalistic system. This program, which attempted to fit not only the economical needs, but also the psychological needs of the unemployed, ended because policy makers feared that the government would enter competition with private employers. As a result of this dilemma employment programs had to be less attractive than private employment, thereby providing incentives for the unemployed to work in the private sector. This was the reason why Roosevelt stuck to the idea to end the CWA despite the public outcry.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to the CWA, the WPA, which lasted from 1935-1939, required means tests and investigations by social workers to determine eligibility. The WPA was, thus, the conservative response to the attack on the CWA by private industries.<sup>35</sup>

### **3.2 Private Enterprise or State Economy**

Another serious debate between progressive social reformers and businesspeople was about the kind of work provided by the government. Social workers supported the CWA's policy of using the skills of the unemployed to provide themselves with essential goods and services. This did not only maintain the morale of skilled workers but also provided goods urgently needed by those who could not afford them. The fear of private industries was that these production for use projects would interfere with their production for profit.

Nevertheless the CWA saw an expansion of production for use projects. One reason for the government to promote production for use was to make public works programs more efficient and to avoid the impression of make-work or boondoggle. Other factors that contributed

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Rose, 99.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 89.

to the increase of production for use were that these were the least expensive types of projects and that it was the most important kind of work relief for women, who worked primarily in sewing rooms, mattress-making projects, and projects of gardening and canning food. However, production for use projects raised a fundamental question:

“since production-for-profit was not a sufficient motive to induce business to produce needed goods and the government was producing them instead, why depend on the private sector at all?”<sup>36</sup>

Because the Roosevelt Administration did, of course, never intend to transform the economic system into a planned state-economy, it decided to end most production for use projects in the WPA.

Although production for use was still an important part of the WPA with about 56% of all women on the WPA working on such projects, the WPA did neither put idle workers to work in idle factories nor provided federal aid to cooperatives, which was part of the CWA. “The content of WPA projects reflected lessons learned in the FERA and the CWA.”<sup>37</sup> About 77% of the money spent on the WPA went to construction, which was less controversial than production for use. However, this also meant that barbers, shoemakers, and tailors worked along with unskilled workers on the same construction projects. As a result 61% of the work assignments were different from the workers’ usual occupations.<sup>38</sup> Again the WPA refused to offer appropriate work for skilled laborers for fear of interfering with business-interests.

The projects for professional and nonmanual workers, among them the impressive cultural projects of the “Federal One”, were also a result of this fear. Employing people in research and record projects, in education, in arts, music, writing, and theatre projects was fairly unlikely to be seen as a competition to private businesses. 11% of WPA funds were spent on these projects, and while especially the arts projects were criticized for being un-American or even communist, they were

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>38</sup> Bremer, 210.

essentially a response to the conservative criticism of production for use projects.

### 3.3 Art and Revolution?

Like the myth of the WPA as being a leftist reform project, the myth of innovative, progressive, and even communist ideas in the cultural projects of the WPA remains persistent in the popular view.<sup>39</sup> The degree of communist influence was indeed a matter of continuous debate. Already in the election campaign of 1936 opponents of the New Deal referred preferably to the cultural programs when accusing the government of being undermined by communists. As a matter of fact many intellectuals in the 1930's were attracted by socialist ideas. The memories of the critic Alfred Kazin represent the view of many artists of that period:

"I felt moral compulsions to be a Socialist since the society in which sixteen million people were jobless [...], did not seem to admit of saving [...]. Everyone I knew in New York was a Socialist, more or less."<sup>40</sup>

There was also a broad coalition of liberal reformists and orthodox Marxists among American intellectuals, a result of the economic crisis as well as of the popular front that was proclaimed by the Communist Party.

Nevertheless the impression of a "red decade" is more the product of leftist and conservative rhetorics than a historical fact. In summary, the "Federal One" was not marked by communist ideology, but by a newly awakened interest in the American cultural tradition. This paradox is expressed well by Jerre Mangione: "While the gospel of Marx and Lenin was rapidly drawing converts, there was developing a strong movement to understand and interpret the American 'character'."<sup>41</sup> A closer look at the two most important cultural projects will reveal the general orientation of the WPA cultural projects towards regionalism and American traditionalist values.

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<sup>39</sup> Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard: "New Deal Cultural Programs: Experiments in Cultural Democracy" (1995). On: *Webster's World of Cultural Policy Home Page*. Available <http://www.wgcd.org/policy/US/newdeal.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in: Nate, 89.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

As the other projects of the "Federal One", the Federal Writers Project (FWP) was characterized by a general interest in the cultural roots of the country. The "American Guidebooks", probably the best known products of the FWP, were an important instrument in the process of cultural self-affirmation.<sup>42</sup> Researching the folk tradition was another aspect of the FWP. The resulting collection of American ballads and folk songs were hardly expressing communist ideology. Admittedly, the FWP slave narratives or the documentation of poor farmers "These Are Our Lives" were influenced by a genuine social concern. However, despite the political radicalism of many writers, the FWP, regarded as a whole, was far from being a cultural breeding ground for communism.

The project that was attacked most heavily for spreading communist propaganda was the Federal Theatre Project (FTP). Following the official idea of Harry Hopkins for a "free, adult, and uncensored theatre," the content varied from contemporary and classical performances to vaudeville shows.<sup>43</sup> The program as a whole can not be accused for leftist ideas, although it had the reputation of making political theatre. This is mainly due to the controversial "Living Newspaper", a documentary theatre that dealt with political topics and that was often accused for its New Deal propaganda. Taken collectively the "Living Theatre" was only one of many theatre projects and it dramatized social issues without necessarily promoting socialist ideas.

The view of the "Federal One" as a mouthpiece for radical ideas is also contradicted by a shift in the cultural climate that could be observed in the mid 1930's. "The satirical tone of the 1920's and the cynicism of the early 1930's now gave way to a more hopeful view of America and the American people."<sup>44</sup> This new hope was expressed in John Steinbeck's famous novel *The Grapes of Wrath* as well as in plays like Thornton Wilders *Our Town*. The cultural nationalism of the late 1930's found expression in the general interest in regional literature, music, and art. In contrast to the accusations of being politically radical,

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<sup>42</sup> Nate, 92.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in: Nate, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Boyer, 747.

the WPA cultural projects reflected this newly rediscovered appreciation for the American nation.

## 5. Conclusion

For many years historians helped to create the myth of the New Deal as a radical break with existing social and cultural policies, motivated by bold experimentation, liberal enthusiasm, and a leftist intellectual climate. The conventional view of the "turbulent years" has only recently been challenged by historians.<sup>45</sup> This image may be the result of many factors. Roosevelt's surprisingly modern PR-campaign contributed to this myth, making Americans believe that the New Deal was fundamentally different from the policies of the Hoover administration. Conservatives also helped to create this impression by repeatedly spreading the fear of an Administration subverted by communists.

**Kommentar:** Conventional interpretation of New Deal challenged by the paper

"Historians have accepted economic innovation as the standard by which to measure the New Deal's accomplishments." <sup>46</sup> In contrast, this paper focused more on the ideological tradition and the social and cultural climate surrounding the WPA. As a result, it could be shown that the New Deal was deeply rooted in the tradition of welfare in America, and that policymakers just reacted to an explosive climate. Also, a closer look at the guiding principles of WPA projects revealed the conservative American values the New Deal was based on. One should keep in mind, however, that the WPA was only one project of many, and that the findings regarding the WPA can not simply be applied to other New Deal measures.

**Kommentar:** Summary of paper's argument

The approach used in this paper may be best described by David Brody, who suggested that "the interesting questions are not in the realm of what might have been, but in a closer examination of what did happen." <sup>47</sup> The 1930's are far too complex a decade to reduce them to a certain dominating policy. If this paper emphasized the

**Kommentar:** Limits of the paper, outlook on further research aspects

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<sup>45</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky, "Not so 'Turbulent Years': Another Look at the American 1930's", in: *The New Deal. Conflicting Interpretations and Shifting Perspectives*, ed. M. Dubofsky (New York: Garland, 1992), 123.

<sup>46</sup> Bremer, 201.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in: Dubofsky, 125.

traditional approach of the WPA and its conservative values, it did so at the cost of reducing the importance of New Deal legislation. It is generally accepted that the New Deal fundamentally changed American domestic policies. FDR became the first modern president, the Democratic Party reached a new basis of voters, and the relationship between state and economy was altered significantly.<sup>48</sup> However, since the dominant view of the New Deal is still one of fundamental change and reform, studies that look closer at the conservatism of the Roosevelt administration and its roots within the American tradition may contribute to a more balanced and accurate picture of that period.

**Kommentar:** Contribution of the paper to scholarly debate on New Deal, purpose & justification.

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<sup>48</sup> Horst Dippel, *Geschichte der USA* (München: Beck, 2002), 95.

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