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Political Sociological Models of the U.S. New Deal

Jeff Manza
Department of Sociology, Northwestern University, 1810 Chicago Avenue, Evanston, Illinois 60208-1330; e-mail: manza@nwu.edu

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■ **Abstract** The U.S. New Deal raises issues of class, race, gender, region, social movements, and institutional constraint in the context of a societal-wide economic and political crisis, and has not surprisingly generated a considerable body of work by political sociologists over the past twenty years. In particular, the New Deal has served as a major empirical context for developing, testing, or applying broader theoretical models of political change in the United States. In this sense, it is a paradigmatic example of the "historical turn" in the social sciences. This paper examines the theoretical and empirical controversies that have persisted between four competing theoretical models of New Deal political change: (*a*) those emphasizing the importance of social movements from below in generating momentum for political reform, (*b*) those highlighting the centrality of business influence on successful New Deal reform initiatives, (*c*) feminist models, and (*d*) historical institutional models. I then turn to a survey of more recent work on some of the topics that have been the most widely debated in more recent scholarship and pose some questions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Few historical conjunctures have excited as many sociological imaginations as the United States in the 1930s. The New Deal vortex raises issues of class, race, gender, region, social movements, and institutional constraint in the context of a societal-wide economic and political crisis. The cumulative body of work by political sociologists on the New Deal over the past twenty years is by now substantial. The New Deal has served as a major empirical context for developing, testing, or applying broader theoretical models of political change in the United States. In this sense, it is a paradigmatic example of the "historical turn" in the social sciences (McDonald 1996).

The purpose of this paper is to dissect the animated debates among political sociologists over the causes and consequences of political change during the New Deal era (bounded roughly by the years 1933 and 1940). I start with a brief overview

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of some of the main contours of political development during the period, and I outline the subjects that have been studied by political sociologists writing about the New Deal. In reviewing what has been written over the past two decades, it is striking how much attention has been paid to issues of labor market regulation and (to a lesser extent) social movements, and how little attention has been paid to other New Deal policy arenas. Part two of the paper examines the theoretical and empirical controversies that have persisted between four competing theoretical models of New Deal political change: (*a*) those emphasizing the importance of social movements from below in generating momentum for political reform, (*b*) those highlighting the centrality of business influence on successful New Deal reform initiatives, (*c*) feminist models, and (*d*) historical institutional models. I also identify recent work that synthesizes insights from several theoretical traditions to develop more comprehensive accounts. Part three surveys in more detail some of the topics that have been the most widely debated in more recent scholarship and poses some questions for future research.

THE NEW DEAL AND POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

The political reforms and policy innovations of the New Deal developed in response to an economic crisis of unprecedented magnitude (Kennedy 1999). Between 1929 and 1933, US GNP fell by 46%, and unemployment rose from less than 4% of the labor force to over 25% by 1933. The impact of economic decline was felt by virtually every sector of the economy, although there was variation in timing and severity of the downturn (for overviews of the economic crisis, see Bernstein 1987; Bordo et al 1998). The crisis spawned several social movements, including those among unemployed workers, old age movements, and the industrial labor movement (for an overview, see Amenta 1998). The Democratic Party swept the elections of 1932, picking up 97 new seats in the House of Representatives (after a gain of 53 seats in 1930), and Democrat Franklin Roosevelt was elected President, taking office in March 1933.

The reformist phase of the New Deal, directed by the Roosevelt Administration—frequently at the prodding of an activist Congress—lasted from 1933 to 1938. The infamous first "Hundred Days" of March-June 1933 was marked by an incredible array of legislative initiatives aimed at stimulating recovery. Among the most important of these were: the National Industrial Recovery Act [promoting the development of industrywide "codes of fair competition" to regulate production practices in each industry, to be jointly administered by management and labor under the supervision of a new National Recovery Administration (NRA)]; the Agricultural Adjustment Act (production controls and government subsidies for farmers); the Banking Act of 1933 (creating the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation); the Tennessee Valley Authority Act (rural development, created the Tennessee Valley Authority); and banking and finance reform (including taking the United States off the gold standard). In the next 18 months, a series of emergency relief and work relief programs were adopted, including the Works Progress Administration, as well as the National Housing Act of 1934 (providing low-interest loans and creating the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation), and the Securities and Exchange Act.

Recovery was slow and uneven, but the Democrats made further (and unprecedented) gains in the midterm elections of 1934 (picking up 9 House and 10 Senate seats). In the summer of 1935, a second bout of reform legislation (sometimes referred to as the "Second New Deal") was adopted. These included, most importantly, the Social Security Act (establishing unemployment insurance, old age insurance, old age assistance, and Aid to Dependent Children), the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act (pro-union legislation barring unfair employer labor practices and establishing a National Labor Relations Board to administer compliance), a wealth tax, the Banking Act (centralizing the Federal Reserve), and the Public Utilities Holding Company Act (regulating utility companies). The final major reform of the New Deal era was the adoption of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 (setting minimum wages and maximum working hours across most industries).

Even the briefest of overviews of the political struggles and policy reforms of the New Deal era, such as that above, demonstrates that the political reforms launched during the New Deal proceeded on many fronts. Yet, as the rest of this paper demonstrates, almost all of the work of sociologists (and other social scientists) has addressed only a handful of topics: political struggles in policy fields relating to labor market regulation and social provision (especially the various provisions of the Social Security Act, the Wagner Act, and agricultural reform), and the social and political impact of the various social movements of the period. Other than the NRA, key New Deal business and financial regulations have gone largely unexplored by sociologists, perhaps because the focus has been on highly contested innovations that were not expected in the context of business dominance and limited-government ideology of the 1920s.

THEORETICAL CONTROVERSIES OVER THE NEW DEAL

Sociologists wrote about and, to some extent, participated in New Deal political struggles and policy contests in the 1930s and 1940s. Yet it was not until the generation of scholars who came of age in the 1960s sought to reassess the limits and possibilities of political change in the United States that the New Deal began to receive sustained attention from sociologists. Among the most influential early works of this generation were those of Domhoff (1970:ch. 6), Block (1977), Piven & Cloward (1977), and Skocpol (1980). Each sketched out early versions of theoretical standpoints that would much influence later debates. Domhoff (1970) first applied his version of a business-centered model of reform to the New Deal. Block (1977) advanced a class struggle model of the New Deal (and other reformist episodes in US political history), highlighting the dual roles of business confidence and pressures from below in creating (or denying) the possibility of reform. Piven

& Cloward (1977:41–180) emphasized the causal importance of social struggles from below, arguing that the Social Security Act and the Wagner Act resulted directly from the pressures brought to bear on state managers by New Deal era social movements. Skocpol (1980) argued that previous analysts had ignored the causal significance of the unique structure of American political institutions in shaping New Deal outcomes, and advanced an early "state-centered" theoretical model.

Following from these early works, three global explanations of New Deal political change developed and have persisted over the past two decades: political struggles models, business-centered models, and institutional models; these have been joined more recently by feminist models. Because each of these explanatory models remains a central pole in the debate over the New Deal, it is worth describing in some detail the main arguments and evidence their proponents have offered. At the same time, however, it is important to keep in mind that virtually no individual analyst is wedded solely to one theoretical model. Most have found it useful, especially in more recent contributions, to incorporate insights from more than one stance in the debate.

Political Struggle Models

The first model can be characterized as the political struggle approach. It argues that domestic state-building reforms often result from episodes of intense labor conflict or struggles by social movements of subordinate groups, forcing concessions by political elites from above. The larger theoretical proposition underlying such models is that capitalist states seek to maintain social equilibrium and will act against the wishes of dominant classes in cases where pressures from below cause the costs of not acting to exceed the costs of reform (cf. Poulantzas 1978, Therborn 1978). The New Deal can be viewed as a prototypical example of such dynamics in the context of American political history. The class struggles and social movements during the 1930s included the industrial labor movement, the unemployed councils movement, the Long, Townsend, and Coughlin movements, and local or regional third party movements. The cumulative political impact of these movements are viewed by political struggle analysts as having forced political elites to consider reforms that would have been otherwise inconceivable (e.g. Brenner 1985). The distinctive feature of the political struggle model in analyzing the New Deal is an emphasis on the key roles played by radicals in fomenting struggle from below.

The most systematic applications of political struggle models to the New Deal have focused on the Wagner Act (e.g. Piven & Cloward 1977:ch. 3, Milton 1982, Davis 1986, pp. 52–74, Levine 1988:ch. 6, Goldfield 1989, 1991) and the Social Security Act (e.g. Piven & Cloward 1977:ch. 2, Jenkins & Brents 1989, Casebeer 1994, L. Gordon 1994:ch. 8). These policies represented dramatic extensions of the previous commitments of New Deal politicians (including President Franklin Roosevelt) prior to 1933, and all emerged in the face of diffuse social movement pressures from below.

An uncompromising version of the political struggle thesis is advanced by Goldfield (1989, 1990) in an examination of the origins of the Wagner Act.

Goldfield argues that "the most reasonable hypothesis to account for the passage of the National Labor Relations Act is that labor militancy, catapulted into national prominence by the 1934 strikes and the political response to this movement, paved the way for the passage of the act" (1989, p. 1273). His account rests on two central claims. First, he argues there were important linkages between the industrial labor movement between 1933 and 1937, and the broader social movements of the period (1989, pp. 1269–70). Second, left-wing political forces, especially but not exclusively those associated with the Communist Party, were important for coordinating struggles and building the industrial labor movement (cf. Zeitlin & Stepin-Norris 1989). Reviewing the Congressional debates over the Wagner bill, Goldfield argues that the *combination* of New Deal social movements and the growing radicalization of the labor movement created a pervasive sense among members of Congress that events were spinning out of control and something had to be done to bring the growing radicalism to a heel. A desire to protect the forces of moderation within the labor movement, particularly the AFL unions, was a prime motivation for many liberal politicians to support the Wagner Act (1989:1274–75; see also Levine 1988:3).

These claims are not uncontroversial. Finegold & Skocpol (1984:177–78, Skocpol & Finegold 1990:1301–3) argue that it was changes in state policy (in particular, the adoption of the labor organizing provisions of the NIRA) that set in motion the labor insurgency (cf. Brody 1993:120–28; Piven & Cloward 1977:116ff.) or allowed it to succeed (cf. Amenta 1998:109–10). Further, Skocpol & Finegold (1990:1304–5) reason that if class struggles alone could produce prolabor reforms such as the Wagner Act, why didn't the equally extensive labor mobilizations of 1919–1920 and 1945–1946 produce favorable policy outcomes? Systematic work on such questions is still in its infancy. Amenta and his colleagues (Amenta 1998, Amenta et al 1992, Amenta et al 1994, Cauthen & Amenta 1996, Amenta & Poulsen 1996) use state-level variation in New Deal era social spending programs as a lens through which to systematically examine how and when social movements actually impact government priorities. Amenta (1998) concludes that social movement strength alone cannot explain state-level New Deal outcomes. Social movements making demands for social spending programs had their biggest impact in those states with democratic political systems and reform-oriented governments in place, but weaker impacts in patronage-oriented states, in those "undemocratic" states where large numbers of voters were disenfranchised (especially in the South), or in states without reform-oriented administrations in power. The emphasis in political struggle accounts on the roles of radicals in the development of insurgency is probably also overstated (see below for further discussion).

Business and the New Deal

A second set of models of the New Deal (and American political development more generally) explain reform outcomes as the result of the activities of key business groups and/or corporate leaders, sometimes viewed in the context of pressures for reform bubbling up from below. Among advocates of these business-centered models, there are important differences of opinion over *which* segment of the capitalist class may take on a progressive role, and the reasons *why*. Nevertheless, all business-centered models share two basic assumptions about the political change in the United States: (*a*) One or more segments of the capitalist class became influential in supporting and shaping the development of new policy initiatives; and (*b*) the dynamics of intraclass struggle among segments of the corporate community played crucial roles in shaping policy outcomes.

One version of the model was developed by Berkowitz & McQuaid (1992 [1980]). They argued the emergence of the American welfare state involved the gradual adoption of organizational innovations first developed in the private sector, especially the various forms of private social insurance, into the public sector (see also Jacoby 1993, Richards 1994, Sass 1997). Berkowitz & McQuaid argue that the underdevelopment of state administrative structures in the United States has often led government bureaucrats to look to the private sector for ideas and organizational forms [cf. Brand (1988) and Finegold & Skocpol (1995) on the case of National Recovery Administration]. In the case of the New Deal, reformers did not create new bureaucratic forms de novo, but rather built upon existing innovations in large-scale business enterprises and government/business cooperation in the 1920s and earlier (see also Jacoby 1993). The handful of welfare capitalists involved in the inner circle of the New Deal, including those on advisory panels such as the Business Advisory Council of the Department of Commerce or to the Committee on Economic Security, had disproportionate influence not because they represented a large faction of business, but by virtue of their leadership in private reform initiatives (Berkowitz & McQuaid 1992:chs. 5–6).

Quadagno's (1988a) analysis of the origins of old age pensions and Colin Gordon's (1994) analysis of New Deal labor and social insurance reforms go further to analyze the logic of business support for experimental public programs (see also Levine 1988, Ferguson 1984, 1995, Swenson 1996, n.d., Klein 1998). Employers had a number of incentives for maintaining private, or company, welfare programs: to promote employee loyalty, to reduce turnover, prevent unions, and to encourage the retirement of older, less-productive workers. But these initiatives also imposed costs on employers, costs that tended to rise over time. This was especially true of pensions, which increased as the proportion of superannuated workers in a plan increased (i.e. until the plan reached maturity). Quadagno (1988) and C. Gordon (1994) argue that these costs came to be viewed by the late 1920s as exceeding the benefits of the programs, especially in fragmented and competitive industries. Employer support among this group of employers for the Social Security Act was based on the advantages of a public program that would socialize such costs by imposing them on recalcitrant competitors.

Although most of the work on the logic of business support for the New Deal has focused on the Social Security Act or business and financial regulation, C. Gordon (1994) and Swenson (1996, n.d.) have developed a similar model with respect to New Deal labor reform (see also Domhoff 1990:ch. 4). They argue that some employers, especially those in highly fragmented industries such as coal, clothing, construction, textiles, and light manufacturing, experimented with regulatory unionism as a way of achieving industrywide cost standardization. The problem faced by employers in such industries was similar to the problems of welfare capitalist firms: Free-riding employers who refused to follow a union standard could gain competitive advantages (cf. Rogers 1990). This caused some employers to support section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act (which required industrywide codes to permit labor organization) and, ultimately, the Wagner Act after the NIRA was held unconstitutional in May 1935.

One of the crucial questions raised by all business-centered models is precisely how economic power gets translated into political power. C. Gordon (1994) unearths direct evidence of business support, whereas Swenson (n.d.:chs. 7–8) emphasizes the signals given off by some employers to New Deal elites as crucial to shaping the emerging legislation. In Swenson's model, these signals were of crucial importance, because they suggested what was, and was not, likely to generate long-run business support and create the possibilities for class compromise. These perceptions, in turn, shaped the choices made among competing reform proposals by New Deal elites.

Domhoff's (1970, 1990, 1996, 1998) work emphasizes the importance of corporate influence on policy ideas in shaping the responses to the emerging crisis. Domhoff argues that elite policy organizations and policy networks heavily influenced by business interests formulate the ideas and programs that state managers (who are themselves typically recruited from the same networks) are most likely to draw upon during periods of reform. He has applied this model to the New Deal in analyses of the AAA, the NRA, the Social Security Act, and the Wagner Act. For example, Domhoff's analysis of the formation of the Social Security Act posits a crucial role for the groups of policy experts and political reformers aligned with Rockefeller interests. Many key experts involved in drafting the Act were drawn from the Rockefeller-financed Industrial Relations Counsellors, Inc., a business consulting firm whose board of directors included the vice-president of US Steel and and the chairmen of General Electric and International Harvester. Experts working on the unemployment insurance provisions, and two of the three key experts working on old-age pensions, for example, were drawn from the ranks of the IRC. His most recent work (e.g. Domhoff 1996:ch. 5) shows the close links between this group and its corporate sponsors, including John D. Rockefeller Jr. himself, and provides evidence that they systematically drew upon years of providing advice to welfare capitalist firms in drawing up the social security legislation. This evidence is developed by Domhoff in the context of an overall model that also emphasizes the importance of the political constraints imposed by Southern Democrats on the New Deal.

Critics of business-centered models have argued that they overstate business involvement in the drafting and development of New Deal social legislation, and understate the depth of business opposition to political reform (Skocpol 1980, Skocpol & Amenta 1985, Amenta & Parikh 1991, Amenta 1998:117–19). The controversy has been sharpest over the Social Security Act. The more recent and direct evidence of corporate influence on the shaping of old-age insurance and unemployment insurance programs (e.g. C. Gordon 1994, Domhoff 1996, Swenson 1996, n.d., Klein 1998), however, has not to date been systematically considered or addressed by institutional critics of business-centered models.

Feminist Analyses of the New Deal

In the recent debates within political sociology, particularly with respect to the origins and development of the welfare state, gender-centered approaches have gained influence (Orloff 1993b, 1996). Traditional approaches to the origins and development of the welfare state in the United States often ignored the ways in which gendered social relations and ideological categories structure both political debates and policy outcomes (L. Gordon 1994, Mettler 1999). Two distinct contributions of feminist social scientists to understanding the New Deal can be identified. First, much has been written about the impact of women's organizations on the Progressive era, when an emergent maternalist form of social provision seemed to offer an alternative path to a modern welfare state in the United States (e.g. Fitzpatrick 1990, Muncy 1991, Skocpol 1992, Sklar 1993, L. Gordon 1994, Mink 1995). These maternalist programs included wage and hour legislation (which was often applied initially only to women workers), mothers' pensions, and the Shepard-Towner Act of 1921 (providing health benefits for mothers and children). They were developed and promoted by a group of women social scientists and reformers grouped around the Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor since the Progressive Era. Yet during the New Deal era itself, maternalist social programs were submerged by the development of the broader social insurance programs embodied in the Social Security Act, and the women's network lost influence in the social insurance policy field (cf. Muncy 1991, L. Gordon 1994). Indeed, the New Deal is the one period of welfare statebuilding that was directed primarily at men, or families with male breadwinners (Orloff & Monson n.d.).

The second point of departure for feminist contributions to the New Deal has centered on the basic insight that welfare state programs distinguish core programs that provide relatively generous benefits distributed in the form of *entitlements* and are directed at (primarily male) wage-earners from those (peripheral) programs providing means-tested, relatively stingy, and stigmatizing benefits that are available to nonwage earners (primarily women and children) (Orloff 1993b, Mettler 1999). Similar analyses have been developed concerning race (see below). Feminists have argued that during the New Deal, programmatic distinctions between social insurance and welfare first became entrenched in national public policy (Mink 1995, Mettler 1999). New Deal reformers assumed that men were, and should be, the primary breadwinners for their families, and thus social insurance programs were to be targeted first at men (thereby protecting married women and children as well). For example, the old age insurance provisions of the Social Security Act were offered primarily to the full-time workforce (disproportionately made up of men). By contrast, a majority of women workers were in occupations that were not covered by the old age insurance and unemployment provisions of the Act. For these recipients, meager state-run social assistance programs were the primary source of social support (Mink 1995, Mettler 1999).

Historical Institutional Models

Finally, there are approaches to explaining the New Deal that grant causal primacy to institutional factors. The appearance of a "new" institutionalism in the social sciences has occasioned considerable interest and debate in recent years. In comparative political sociology and political science, "scholars . . . writing on subjects as diverse as the political economy of advanced capitalism and policy-making during China's Great Leap Forward have all focused on the significance of institutional variables for explaining outcomes in their respective fields" (Thelen & Steinmo 1992:1). The variant of institutionalist scholarship most influential in recent political sociology, generally referred to as historical institutionalism, emphasizes the ways in which institutions shape the perceptions of interests and the behaviors of individuals and groups, promoting some possible policy and/or political outcomes while discouraging others (Immergut 1998).

The general problem of American exceptionalism—why the United States is different on a number of political dimensions from comparable capitalist democracies—has been a frequent starting point for historical institutional analyses of American politics (e.g. Skocpol 1992, 1995, Steinmo 1993a, 1993b, Orloff 1993a). Political sociologists are in fairly widespread agreement that institutional factors have powerfully contributed to the making of American exceptionalism. The Constitution creates a set of governing institutions designed to pit factions against one another by explicitly protecting minority interests, for example, thereby creating a fragmented patchwork of decision-making nodes (Neustadt 1990). This institutional fragmentation is manifested in a variety of ways: (*a*) federalism: many important policy decisions are controlled by state governments, and policies hence varied, occasionally widely, across the states (Beer 1994, C. Gordon 1994, Moss 1996); (*b*) the unique power of federal and state courts to either bottle up legislation or, in some cases, to resolve legislative deadlocks (Weaver & Rockman 1993:31, Hattam 1992); (*c*) the decentralization of power in Congress, and the power of committee chairs to bottle up legislation they do not favor (Shepsle & Weingast 1987), an especially important source of Southern influence during the New Deal (e.g. Domhoff 1990:97–98, Skocpol 1995, pp. 29–30); (*d*) the requirement of legislative supermajorities: for example, presidents can sustain vetos with only one third plus one voting member of either chamber of Congress; and (*e*) the weakness of the federal bureaucracy, in particular its permeability at all levels and the dependence of bureaucratic officials on Congress for support, which weakens their allegiance to the President who appoints them (Heclo 1977, Skowronek 1982). One crucial consequence of the institutional and political fragmentation of the

American polity is to create multiple veto points (Immergut 1992) for groups contesting political reform proposals.

Institutional factors also contributed to the weakness of working class political forces. The early extension of the franchise (albeit only to white men) meant that struggles for voting rights were not linked to union organization or agitation for socialism or social insurance, as in many parts of Europe. The political defeats suffered by broad-based unions in the late nineteenth century at the hands of hostile employers, the courts, and in many cases from federal or state government intervention, precluded the emergence of class-wide organization until the 1930s (Hattam 1993, Voss 1994, but cf. Dubofsky 1994). At no time were American workers able to build stable ties to a labor-based political party comparable to those of Western Europe (Shefter 1994: ch. 4).

In their work on the New Deal, historical institutionalists have emphasized, in addition to the basic institutional constraints identified above, the importance of institutional and political legacies in constraining the possibilities for political reform in the 1930s. These legacies are often viewed as concentrated especially in the party system and national governmental capacity. Probably the most well-known applications to the New Deal can be found in the work of Skocpol (1980, 1995) and her collaborators (e.g. Skocpol & Ikenberry 1983, Weir & Skocpol 1985, Weir, Orloff, & Skocpol 1988, Finegold & Skocpol 1995). Finegold & Skocpol (1995) provide a recent and systematic application to the New Deal in a comparative study of the success of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, and the failure of the National Industrial Recovery Act. They argue that these reform outcomes in the two policy domains varied because of (*a*) crucial differences in the types of pre-existing state capacities in the two cases; and (*b*) the changing shape of the Democratic and Republican Party coalitions during the 1930s. In agriculture, unusual statebuilding successes prior to the New Deal made possible successful implementation of production control policies previously resisted by virtually all farm interests. In the case of the NIRA, however, the absence of previous state capacity made implementation of economy-wide measures deeply problematic, and the abandonment of the Democratic Party by powerful business interests after 1934 crippled intra-party incentives to fix the initial design (Finegold & Skocpol 1995).

Any assessment of the explanatory and analytical power of historical institutional models as applied to the New Deal must begin by distinguishing between weak and strong versions of the theory. In the weak version, political institutions are viewed as shaping actor strategies and beliefs on the one hand, and political outcomes on the other, by favoring some types of action and hindering others. The strong version asserts that state institutions and/or state managers have the potential capacity to become autonomous from other social forces and to carry out reforms reflecting their own interests or goals (e.g. Skocpol 1985, Hooks 1990).

The strong version has rarely been applied to the New Deal, with the exception of some early work by Skocpol and her collaborators that has been abandoned in more recent work. The comparative logic of the weak version of historical institutionalism, by contrast, has influenced many accounts. There is widespread agreement that institutional features of the American political system have shaped political strategies and policy outcomes and, in particular, placed considerable obstacles in the way of the kinds of social spending programs favored by many New Deal leaders. One major challenge to the weak version of the institutional model, however, has come from those analysts who have sought to identify the racial bases of state formation in the United States (Quadagno 1994, Goldfield 1997). The argument asserts that in the causal ordering of political change, institutional arrangements were themselves the result of race-based political dynamics and hence can be no more than mediating variables. Constitutional compromises such as divided government and states' rights stemmed from the demands of Southern elites to maintain slavery as an economic system (cf. Fredrickson 1981). The compromise of 1877 ended Reconstruction on terms favorable to the Southern planter elite, creating the conditions for the reconstruction of racial domination and eventually the one-party Southern political order that persisted into the 1930s (cf. Foner 1988). In other words, the very political institutions that hindered New Deal reform initiatives must themselves be traced to a system of racial domination in combination with the unique political economy of the South (Alston & Ferrie 1989, 1999, Quadagno 1994, Domhoff 1990, 1996, Goldfield 1997, Piven & Cloward 1997).

SOCIAL FORCES, POLITICAL CHANGE, AND THE NEW DEAL

The New Deal has excited sociological imaginations in part because of the diversity of social forces and political processes that it set in motion. Much of the recent (and likely future) work by political sociologists on the New Deal focuses more narrowly on particular aspects of the period. Comparative work has been fairly limited to date, but it is also likely that future investigations will examine the more broadly comparative aspects of the New Deal. In this section, I briefly highlight some of the recent scholarship on race and geography, labor, intellectuals, electoral realignment, and comparative perspectives.

Race and the New Deal

New Deal reforms were constructed in the face of racial division and conflict, and analysts have paid considerable attention to the ways in which racial politics undermined the prospects for certain types of reforms. There has also been considerable research on the racial impact of the New Deal. Finally, there has been extensive work on the logic of race and the political economy of the South in shaping both New Deal programmatic initiatives and their implementation.

African Americans and the New Deal At the onset of the Depression, no group faced greater hardship than African Americans. Yet, across a range of New Deal programs, most programmatic initiatives either neglected the needs of African Americans or were implemented in ways that systematically favored whites over blacks (Quadagno 1988, 1994, Valocchi 1994, Brown 1999). There was, to be sure, variation across policy domains, and especially over time (cf. Amenta 1998:ch. 4 on New Deal work relief; Lieberman 1998:ch. 3 on old age insurance), but the general pattern has now been well documented (see Wolters 1970, Valocchi 1994: 352–55, Goldfield 1997:ch 6, and Hamilton & Hamilton 1997:ch. 1 for overviews).

For African Americans, the most important policy reforms of the early New Deal were those concerning agriculture. On the eve of the New Deal, over half of all blacks lived in rural areas, and nearly half were employed in agriculture (Valocchi 1994:352). By promoting production controls as the centerpiece of reform, however, the New Deal not only failed to help rural African Americans, they often made conditions worse. Farm owners often took land previously leased to African American tenant farmers out of production, usually without proper compensation (Wolters 1970, Hamilton & Hamilton 1997:13–14).

African Americans fared little better in other New Deal policy domains. The keystone labor market regulation measures of the Second New Deal—the old age insurance program of the Social Security Act, the Wagner Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act—excluded most African-American workers from coverage by excluding all agricultural workers and domestic workers. In some cases it would be decades before full coverage would be granted (Lieberman 1998). The old-age assistance program did cover African Americans, but local administration of program benefits meant that Southern states could actively discriminate in the distribution of benefits (Quadagno 1988b, Brown 1999). Union-centered reforms such as the Wagner Act hardly inspired much confidence among African Americans, who had generally been excluded from AFL unions in the past (Hamilton & Hamilton 1997:33–36). The rise of industrial unions organized by the CIO, and in particular those unions in Communist Party orbit, did change this picture somewhat (Zieger 1995:83–85). But even many of the new CIO unions maintained segregated locals or failed to organize African-American workers (Goldfield 1993). The Roosevelt Administration and the Congress also did little to promote civil rights of African Americans in the 1930s, most notably failing to push through anti-lynching legislation opposed by Southern Democrats. The one partial exception to the otherwise bleak picture were the work relief programs of the Works Progress Administration (Hamilton & Hamilton 1997:24–26, Amenta 1998:ch. 4). Despite local administration, Amenta (1998:157–58) suggests that explicit anti-race discrimination provisions sometimes led to the over representation of African Americans on the WPA rolls (even in parts of the South).

New Deal housing programs are a key set of reforms that contributed in important ways to the future reproduction of racial inequality, though they have not been systematically studied by political sociologists to the same extent as other programs. The Housing Act of 1934 and the creation of the Federal Housing Administration influenced the development of metropolitan housing patterns, frequently in ways that had a powerful impact on racial segregation. In particular, by promoting (or overlooking) the use of racial covenants, or by refusing to insure mortgages in African-American neighborhoods, FHA programs from the 1930s contributed to both segregated housing patterns and the underdevelopment of urban black neighborhoods (cf. Gelfand 1975, Jackson 1985, Massey & Denton 1993). Federal housing officials frequently appointed local realtors in administrative capacities who had little interest in applying nondiscrimination policies (e.g. Goldfield 1997:206), and indeed, some early underwriting manuals explicitly called for segregation (Valocchi 1994:353–54).

Race and Political Geography The unique political geography of the United States [see Bensel (1984) for a historical overview] had a powerful impact on the New Deal. The disfranchisement of African-American and many poor white voters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in most Southern states produced a shriveled, conservative electorate in most of those states and discouraged political action by social or labor movements from below. Uncompetitive elections in most parts of the South meant that Southern political elites had few incentives to respond to whatever popular pressures did emerge, especially once the populist movement was defeated in the 1890s. The labor-intensive, largely agrarian Southern economy encouraged Southern politicians to oppose most types of social spending that might reduce the supply of low-wage labor, and virulent racism further discouraged support for programs that would benefit African Americans (Quadagno 1988b, 1994, Alston & Ferrie 1999, Brown 1999).

Analysts from diverse intellectual traditions have focused on the importance of the South, recognizing both the role of class relations in the Southern political economy and institutional factors (especially Congressional seniority rules) that shaped the behavior of Southern members of Congress and enabled them to exercise disproportionate influence (cf. Domhoff 1970, 1990, C. Gordon 1994, Piven & Cloward 1997, Amenta 1998, Lieberman 1998). The consequences of Southern power have also been widely acknowledged. Two merit special mention. First, Southern members of Congress were able to use their leverage to ensure that New Deal social programs did not provide sufficient benefits for African Americans to disrupt the Southern agrarian economy (e.g. Quadagno 1988a, 1994, Linder 1992: ch. 4, Alston & Ferrie 1999). The overall impact of New Deal relief programs were thereby blunted upon implementation. Southern power also precluded nationalization of the most potentially intrusive labor market regulations (Alston & Ferrie 1999, Brown 1999). Thus, most African-American workers were not covered by the national provisions of the Social Security Act, the National Labor Relations Act, or the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) but instead were limited to programs that were administered locally and frequently in arbitrary ways (Lieberman 1998). Because women were more likely to work in labor force locations that were excluded from full benefits under the Social Security Act, Southern influence also had a disparate gender impact (Mettler 1999). Although arguments about states' rights or limitations of administrative capacity were frequently invoked to support these exclusions (see e.g. Davies & Derthick 1997), both contemporary observers and most later analysts understood that the Southern racial order lay behind the rhetoric (see e.g. Lieberman 1998:51–56).

Second, the power and influence of Southern politicians was a crucial factor in shaping the Democratic Party. These politicians thus put a brake on the capacity of the party to develop into a labor-oriented social democratic party (see e.g. Domhoff 1990:ch. 9, Plotke 1996, Piven & Cloward 1997) and barred the development of a civil rights agenda (Weiss 1983, Hamilton & Hamilton 1997). The policy positions of Southern politicians were not, in general, hostile to social spending programs; in fact, Southern politicians aggressively embraced programs that combined federal resources with local control (Katznelson et al 1993, Lieberman 1998:37, Brown 1999). But anything that involved federal control that would interfere with the Southern political economy was strongly opposed by Southern politicians. It was only after the emergence of widespread mechanization following World War II, and the corresponding black migration to the North, that these pressures began to erode (Piven & Cloward 1997, Alston & Ferrie 1999).

Labor

The 1930s were a remarkable period of transition for the American labor movement, in particular with the creation of viable unions in many previously unorganized industries (even if it would take the economic boom produced by World War II and the postwar years before peak union density would be achieved). The impact of New Deal labor legislation on union growth and development has also been subjected to considerable discussion and analysis.

There has been controversy over the extent and nature of labor radicalism in the 1930s. Verba & Scholzman (1977) examined the limited survey data available from the late 1930s and concluded that there was little evidence of growing class consciousness among even unemployed working class citizens. Finegold & Skocpol (1984, 1995, Skocpol & Finegold 1990) argue that it was the New Deal labor reforms, first under the NIRA and then with the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935, that fundamentally spurred union organizing efforts (see also Brody 1993:120–28). Other analysts have focused on the deradicalizing impact of union bureucratization, noting that many of the CIO unions organized during the 1930s quickly developed organizational routines and hierarchies that blunted shop-floor militance (Mills 1948, Piven & Cloward 1977:ch. 3, Lichtenstein 1989), although such tendencies were less pronounced in those unions led by Communist or other left political forces (Kimmeldorf 1988, Zeitlin & Stepan-Norris 1989, 1992).

The bulk of the research on the labor movement in the 1930s, however, has concluded that labor radicalism was important for building industrial unions (Rubin, Griffin & Wallace 1983). The New Deal years were the high point of left influence in the labor movement, and left-wing labor organizers did a disproportionate share of the "boring of hard boards" during this period (Milton 1982, Fantasia 1988:ch. 2, Zeitlin & Stepan-Norris 1989, Goldfield 1989, Zieger 1995:253–61). Strike activity during the 1933–1934 and 1936–1937 periods was both extensive and unusual. It included several dramatic general strikes in 1934, and a wave of militant sit-down strikes in 1937. Further, a much higher proportion of strikes during this period than either before or since raised demands relating to union representation or workplace organization (Wallace 1989:13), though this would decline after the passage of the Wagner Act (McCammon 1993, 1994). New Deal labor legislation prior to 1937 is viewed by proponents of the labor militancy thesis as having had little enforcement power; hence it was only through the successful organizing drives that unions could began to be built (e.g. Cohen 1993:301ff.)

What was the impact of the organized labor on New Deal policy reforms? Frances Perkins, Roosevelt's choice to be Secretary of Labor, was opposed by union leaders. AFL unions in 1933 aggressively supported a 30-hour bill sponsored by Alabama Senator Hugo Black, and they were never significant factors in the debate over the Administration's alternative to the Black bill, the more sweeping National Industrial Relations Act of 1933 (e.g. Brand 1988). Unions consistently opposed the minimum wage provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which the Roosevelt Administration nonetheless pushed through Congress (Hart 1989). Even if the labor insurgency of 1933–1935 (and the frequently hostile employer responses) contributed to the passage of the Wagner Act, few labor leaders were actively consulted during the drafting of the Act. AFL leaders were unsuccessful in attempting to amend the legislation during Congressional hearings, and when early rulings under the Act favored CIO unions over longstanding AFL organizing strategies, the AFL sought (unsuccessfully) to undermine the Act (Gross 1981, Tomlins 1985:161–95). For its part, CIO unions were unable to prevent the conservative counterattack against the Act beginning in the late 1930s. On other social legislation, notably the drafting and implementation of the Social Security Act, AFL and CIO officials were used in purely advisory roles by Administration officials, but they gained little influence over substantive decision-making processes on any aspect of the SSA (Derthick 1979, Tynes 1996). Both AFL and CIO unions did not begin pushing for national health insurance until 1938, after reform momentum had been lost (Derickson 1994). In short, although some labor leaders such as Sidney Hillman were regularly consulted by the Roosevelt Administration (Fraser 1992), the conclusion that organized labor's impact on New Deal policymaking was limited and indirect at best is probably inescapable.

Policy Experts, Political Intellectuals, and the New Deal

In the debates over the New Deal, the policy and political consequences of the activities of experts and intellectuals have received attention (Manza 1995:chs. 1–2 provides an overview). While some analysts dismiss the actions of experts and intellectuals as mere epiphenomena (e.g. Goldfield 1989, C. Gordon 1994), others have viewed their roles as more decisive. One set of approaches argues that the impetus for reform came from middle-class professionals, who patiently built support for pension reform during a long process of coalition building and reform advocacy dating to the Progressive era (Skocpol 1992, Moss 1996), including pressing the social question into arenas where it had not previously been pressed, frequently in alliance with labor or other social movements from below (Plotke 1996, Fink 1997). At the center of the efforts of these reformers were advocacy organizations such as the American Association for Labor Legislation and the American Association for Old Age Security. Such organizations provided intellectual and political leadership for early pension reform campaigns, and eventually, at the national level during the New Deal. In the case of agriculture, academic social scientists working on rural issues and the relatively large group of experts employed by the Department of Agriculture in the 1920s provided the intellectual foundation for a diverse array of policy ideas about farm planning and management (Finegold & Skocpol 1995, Gilbert & Howe 1991, Gilbert 1997). In these accounts, reform-oriented experts gained influence during the New Deal and were able to implement long promoted agendas.

In the types of analyses discussed in the previous paragraph, the ideas and strategic alliances of experts are seen as having direct causal influence. A more skeptical interpretation of the role of policy experts, but one that nonetheless takes seriously the role of policy ideas in the policymaking process, is developed in Domhoff's (1990:ch. 3–4, 1996:ch. 3, 5) work on New Deal reforms in agriculture, labor, and social security. Domhoff argues that the experts with influence were those who were directly or indirectly sponsored by a segment of the power elite. In the case of social insurance, he makes two arguments. First, key organizations of experts such as the American Association for Labor Legislation were not independent of the power elite, but rather received significant funding from it. Second, experts with more direct links to the power elite, especially through the Rockefeller-financed Industrial Relations Counsellors, Inc., had the greatest impact on the drafting of the Social Security Act.

Stryker (1989, 1990a,b), Shamir (1995), and Manza (1995, n.d.) have developed positions somewhere between these two standpoints. Stryker's work develops a "class-centered functionalist" account to explain the influence of particular types of expertise, and she argues that the advance of technical knowledge is constrained by power relations. In a case study of the elimination of the Division of Economic Research in the National Labor Relations Board, Stryker (1989) demonstrates that although the economists working for the NLRB provided a wide range of technical guidance for the lawyers running the Board, their input came to be perceived as too pro-union to be politically viable. Elsewhere, in comparative analyses of the NLRB and the Social Security Board (Stryker 1990a) and the NLRB and the Federal Trade Commission (Stryker 1990b), she argues that economic knowledge that is either neutral or beneficial for capitalist interests will not meet the same fate.

Shamir (1995) and Manza (1995, n.d.) emphasize the importance of political opportunity and strategic behavior on the part of groups of experts in determining when and how they gain influence. Shamir (1995:ch.6) argues that the promotion of administrative law and social scientific adjudication by a group of legal intellectuals known as the legal realists gave them wide influence inside the New Deal, whereas elite lawyers lost influence for their opposition to New Deal regulatory initiatives. Manza (n.d.) advances a model of strategic action to account for the political alignments of a coherent group of New Deal policy experts active in labor, pension, and health fields. In the labor case, the breakdown of the NIRA framework and the emergence of a revived labor movement from below promoted a set of alliances between experts and the labor movement (reversing the alliances of the 1920s with moderate corporate interests). In the case of pensions, the development of corporate support for some types of contributory pensions encouraged reforms to shift away from their previous support noncontributory pensions in the 1920s.

The Social Bases of the New Deal

Who supported the New Deal? A classical question of political sociology concerns the social bases of political movements, and the New Deal is no exception. Two aspects of the sources of support of the New Deal have received special attention: the electoral dimensions of the New Deal coalition, and campaign finance during the 1930s.

Electoral Realignment? Roosevelt's (and the Democratic Party's) electoral sweeps from 1932 to 1936 were of unprecedented magnitude, inaugurating an era of Democratic dominance of national politics that would last through the late 1960s (and, with a couple of short interruptions, until 1980 at the Congressional level). Scholarly interest in the nature of the realignment toward the Democratic Party has focused most extensively on two questions: (*a*) To what extent was the New Deal electoral realignment driven by class divisions? (*b*) Did the Democratic vote come from the mobilization of new voters, or did it reflect the conversion of previously Republican voters?

Most scholarly assessments of the social bases of the New Deal coalition from the 1930s through the late 1940s have claimed to find unprecedented levels of class polarization, with urban working class, immigrant, and African-American voters swinging to the Democrats to a much greater extent than (white) middle class voters. Although the study of individual-level political behavior was very much in its infancy, contemporary research supported such class-based conclusions about the Democratic realignment (e.g. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet 1948). Postwar scholarship has generally confirmed the impression of class polarization at the ballot box during the New Deal (see e.g. Lawrence 1996:ch. 3). A number of arguments and pieces of evidence have been assembled. The spectacular failure of the *Literary Digest* poll in 1936 to predict Roosevelt's landslide victory has been construed by several analysts as indicating that class differences had increased (hence the significance of the unrepresentative character of the *Literary Digest* readership) (e.g. Burnham 1970:56, Sundquist 1983:215, Lawrence 1996:35). Early survey data confirm large class gaps in voter alignments (e.g. Ladd & Hadley 1978, Weakliem & Heath 1999). Later analysts have generally concluded that class divisions receded after World War II, although different assessments of the timing of this decline has been advanced (cf. Sundquist 1983, Weakliem & Heath 1999, Manza & Brooks 1999:ch. 3).

The debate over the sources of the enlarged Democratic vote beginning in 1932—whether from the mobilization of new voters or the conversion of previously Republican voters—has been investigated as well, though it is difficult to resolve in the absence of individual-level data. In the classical accounts of Key (1955) and Burnham (1970), the New Deal elections were viewed as a key instance of critical realignment of major blocs of voters. At the aggregate level, such conclusions are inarguable, but at the level of group alignments, the picture is more complicated. There is no doubt that in the North, African-American voters swung decisively from Republican to Democratic alignment during the 1930s (Weiss 1983). Studies of white ethnic voters have presented a more complicated picture of realignment. Andersen (1979) combined analyses of retrospective survey data with aggregate, ward-level data from Chicago, concluding that new voters (i.e. those voting for the first time) provided the decisive shift to Roosevelt and the Democrats. Gamm's (1986) analysis of the New Deal realignment in Boston isolated smaller, precinct-level units to permit more rigorous assessment of changes in group alignments. His analyses suggest that only among Jews and, to a lesser extent, African Americans does the group realignment model hold. Italians increased their turnout rates significantly, but not their alignment, while Yankees and the Irish maintained both similar turnout levels and patterns of alignment. Further work on these issues, especially where adequate precinct-level data has survived, is certainly warranted. King's (1997) recent methodological innovations for ecological studies may provide the foundation for a systematic reconsideration of the issues.

Campaign Finance Research on campaign finance, in particular the sources of financial support for the Democratic Party during the 1930s, provides an important empirical context for assessing the question of whether there was an identifiable segment of business support for the New Deal. The Federal Corrupt Practices Act of 1925 required the parties to systematically report all contributions of $100 or more. All analysts recognize that most large contributors to the 1936 presidential campaign backed Republican candidate Alf Landon [Allen (1991) estimates 80% of "inner circle" business elites contributed to the Republicans, while Webber (2000:ch. 1, Webber & Domhoff (1996) estimates 83% of business executives from large companies). Even if the relative amounts they received were modest, understanding where Roosevelt and the Democrats did gain support from capitalist sources has been the subject of much interest. Two concrete hypotheses about the nature of business support for the New Deal were advanced in the 1980s. On the one hand, Fraser (1989) and Friedlander (1987) argue that consumption-oriented industries provided disproportionate Democratic support, on the grounds that policies that would promote income growth among the working class would generate enhanced business. Ferguson's (1995) "investment theory of party competition," by contrast, asserted that internationally oriented and capital-intensive firms were the most likely to support the Democrats. Because of their lower labor costs, Ferguson argues that such firms were willing to acquiesce to reform in exchange for an internationalist, free-trade regime. For these firms, the New Deal provided an attractive set of alliances, and that they (and their executives) provided crucial financial support in return.

Webber & Domhoff (1996) and Webber (2000) offer the most systematic reassessment of these claims, using the crucial 1936 election as a test case. Drawing from official campaign contribution data from records compiled in response to the 1925 Act, they find no evidence that any particular industrial sector—including either the mass consumption industries or capital-intensive, internationally oriented industries—was disproportionately supportive of the New Deal in comparison with the average of all large industries. The only groups of business executives who were disproportionately likely to fund the Democratic Party were Southerners and Jews (see also Allen 1991). In general, however, the ovewhelming majority of business leaders throughout this period were (or remained) Republican (cf. Allen 1991, Almond 1998).

Comparative Perspectives on the New Deal

Finally, it is worth commenting on scholarly efforts to place the New Deal in cross-national context. The economic depression that gripped the United States in the early 1930s was of global proportions, and the political consequences of this crisis of capitalism were felt everywhere. The impact was especially dramatic in the United States, which move from a laggard to a world leader in social spending. This suggests that comparative investigations of New Deal politics are warranted, yet relatively few works have sought to develop systematic comparative analyses.

Historical institutionalists have focused the greatest attention on comparative dimensions of the New Deal. Weir & Skocpol (1985) analyzed the factors that influenced the prospects for a "proto-Keynesian" response to the Great Depression in the United States, Great Britain, and Sweden during the 1930s. The puzzle is to account for why Sweden and the United States moved in the direction of Keynesianism, while Keynes' own Britain (which had high levels of unemployment in the 1920s) did not. Weir & Skocpol argue that the legacies of the early adoption of unemployment insurance and Treasury Policy in Britain shifted the terrain of debate away from macroeconomic measures designed to restore full employment, whereas in Sweden the absence of such programs made possible a more wide-ranging debate. In the United States, the difficulties of successful state-building in other arenas, the accumulation of policy-relevant knowledge, and rising class pressures in the late 1930s made a "proto-Keynesian" solution viable (cf. Weir 1992:ch.2). Dobbin (1993) develops an intriguing analysis of the ideological roots of industrial policy in the United States, Britain, and France in the 1930s. Each country responded to the Depression by reversing previous economic course; in the United States, this meant that a corporatist model gained influence, even to the point that it was embraced by many antimonopoly New Deal Democrats. Orloff

(1993a) examines how geopolitical factors combined with institutional structures and previous policy legacies to influence the substance and timing of the adoption of old-age pensions in Canada, Britain, and the United States. Other examples of comparative research on the New Deal by historical institutionalists would include the research of Amenta (1998:ch. 9) on social spending programs in the United States and Britain, Carruthers (1994) on British and American treasury policy, Hobson (1993) on social policy and women's right to work in the United States and Sweden, and Echeverri-Gent (1993) on rural antipoverty programs in the United States during the New Deal and in contemporary India.

Analysts from other theoretical traditions have, to date, been less concerned with developing comparative research. Richards (1994) examines the factors that led New Zealand to move in the direction of welfare state universalism in the 1930s and contrasts this case to the lingering parochialism in the US New Deal model. Swenson's (n.d.) forthcoming work examines how reformers interested in cross-class alliances in Sweden and the United States acted in cautious response to perceptions of employer interests that were radically different from each other in the two countries. He finds that such strategic behavior affected the different timing and shape welfare state development in the two countries in profound ways.

In general, however, cross-national comparative investigations of the New Deal have been much more limited than either comparative work on other periods of American political development (notably the late nineteenth century and the Progressive eras). Given the long-standing influence of comparative research in the field of political sociology—for example, in the work of Marx, Weber, Moore, and Lipset—it is all the more surprising that greater attention to comparative questions has not been developed. This is likely to be one growth area of New Deal studies in the future, and indeed such research promises to shed new light on the exceptional features of this period.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined some of the myriad ways in which political sociologists have analyzed dimensions of political change during the New Deal. Early theoretical controversies developed among analysts arguing that the primary causal factors in accounting for New Deal political and policy outcomes lay in political struggles from below, business influence from above, gender relations, or the institutional contexts within which political actors struggled. Political sociologists have also begun to examine more refined empirical questions, including investigations of race, political geography, the social bases of New Deal political alignments, the role of intellectuals, and comparative issues. Perhaps more than any other single historical period, the New Deal has highlighted the rich potential for empirical and theoretical work made possible by the historic turn in contemporary social science.

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CONTENTS