

FDR's Alphabet Soup: New Deal America 1932-1939



Synopsis

FDR's New Deal, which followed the 1929 stock market crash, was a hugely influential moment in the history of the United States, encompassing everything from the arts to finance, labor to legislation, and some think it helped bring the country out of the Great Depression. Here, Tonya Bolden, writing in her trademark accessible style, creates a portrait of a time that changed American history both then and now. FDR's First 100 Days and how the United States was changed by it then are closely examined, especially now. The 2009 financial situation is eerily mirrored by that of the late 1920s, and this is a perfect book to help teens understand history and its lasting impact on current events.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Grade 6-9 • Bolden uses the myriad programs of the New Deal, collectively called "alphabet soup" because they were known by their initials or acronyms, as a metaphor to describe how Roosevelt's policies and legislation gave vital nourishment to the American people and created permanent changes in the government and economy. She opens with a discussion of the unprecedented crisis of the Great Depression and Roosevelt's subsequent election, but devotes most of the book to the creation and implementation of New Deal agencies and programs, and includes quotes and primary-source excerpts to show how different segments of the population, such as workers and investors, viewed Roosevelt and his policies. The author views the New Deal

positively, but does discuss how it polarized the American people and drew opposition from both the left and the right. The narrative is supplemented by numerous sidebars and facing-page inserts that provide additional information and well-captioned, high-quality reproductions of period photos and artifacts. Bolden's writing style is contemporary, with brief sentences, short paragraphs, and vocabulary that uses slang and abbreviations that may not win adult approval but will appeal to teens. The book is more focused on the New Deal than Edmund Lindop and Margaret J. Goldstein's *America in the 1930s* (21st Century Bks., 2009), which offers a more comprehensive overview of American life during the decade. — Mary Mueller, Rolla Junior High School, MO Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Displaying her usual gift for well-turned phrasing, the prolific Bolden injects drama and immediacy into events that will seem (and are) ancient history to her audience. Retracing the course of New Deal initiatives from the newly elected Roosevelt's famous First Hundred Days of action! action! to his creation of the powerful Executive Office of the President in 1939, she presents a coherent account of how FDR and his administration successfully (mostly) battled political, ideological, and legal challenges to create a sweeping recovery agenda. In a move that surprisingly picks up the narrative pace, she positively wallows in the era's infamous alphabet soup not only salting her narrative with government agency abbreviations from the AAA to the WPA but dubbing the First Couple FDR and ER and dropping POTUS, SCOTUS, CPUSA (the Communist Party), and a host of labor union tags into the mix. Generously illustrated with period photos and rounded out with a helpful source list, this lively look back both invites and equips readers to ponder the pros and cons of gumptious government in any era. Grades 5-8. --John Peters

I know this is billed as a children's book but my 90-yr-old mom LOVES history that she lived through but some of the adult history books are way too long and detailed for her. A friend found this at the library and it was ideal: short chapters that contained all the salient facts and details that she could relate to. I highly recommend!

This book couldn't have been more timely, coming as it did around the time of the Great Recession. Written for young people, it's wonderfully accessible; doesn't talk down to them and has sufficient detail for anyone trying to understand our own financial trauma by learning how it was dealt with 70-80 years ago. Well-done! Will probably buy more copies for g'children as they get older...

Bolden's newest book, takes a look at FDR's new deal in hopes of ending the great depression. The book begins just prior to FDR's first term in 1928 and goes through 1939, the end of his second term and the beginning of WWII. It's a little scary how much what's going on now relates to what happened with the Great Depression. After that flop, Hoover signed off on a bill that created a new government agency, the RFC (Reconstruction Finance Corporation). Its mission to lend money to businesses on the brink of collapse, most especially financial institutions. The RFC was funded with \$500 million of taxpayers' dollars. The idea behind the RFC was that bailouts for businesses would trickle down to workaday folks. As for them, Hoover felt it folly for the federal government to bail out people on the brink. That's what charities, family and friends were for. The author takes a great impartial look at FDR's New Deal. She looks at all the agencies that were started by Roosevelt in hopes of ending the great depression. Bolden spells out the agencies names only once then uses the acronyms. FDR's Alphabet Soup is very readable and informative. The author uses the sidebar to effectively to explain various terms or government departments. There are several photographs and slogan buttons included from that time period.

Yikes - I couldn't disagree more with the 4 star review ... to each their own? I'm a bit taken aback by a brace of 'young adult' histories, including this one. In the process of making these books more accessible, they have non-historians writing them, and as a result, they make some obvious errors. This one is the worst of the bunch. Here, these historical & contextual errors are compounded by breezy, slangy, writing, and what appears to be a 'leftist' slant, notwithstanding some attempt to provide a balanced view of the pros & cons advanced at the time. Some other reviewers have commented on the choppy style & graphic packaging, so I won't belabor that here. But I do think it important to note that more than 1 'history' 'defines' 'communism' as 'ownership of the means of production by the people.' This is, at best, a gross oversimplification, of some idealized version of "small 'c'" communism. But in this context, this is simply disingenuous. By the 30's, it was clear that 'the people' (in some kind of democratic or representative form) certainly did not 'own' the means of production, or anything else - they were all owned, controlled, and dictated by the State, by then in the name of Stalin and The Party in the USSR. This is beyond trying to be balanced by giving a neutral definition of communism -- again, by the 30s, there simply hadn't been any 'communist' government or economic system that was owned or run by 'the people' - unless one is using the euphemism to refer to 'My People' - and it is misleading to define it as such in the Glossary. This kind of error permeates this genre - oversimplification & an attempt to be politically correct mars what could otherwise be a decent overview & introduction to the New Deal. So, it gets 1 star for a

decent overview, and some glimpse at the various controversies, but minus 1 for the misleading 'definition' of 'communism' (without any attempt to provide further context to the use of that term), minus another 1 for the slang - most of which is out of context & wouldn't be recognized by people in the 30s, minus another 1 for the otherwise breezy, casual, writing style, and minus another 1 for the choppy presentation.

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