

Name \_\_\_\_\_

| Historian Interpretation 1: Carl Degler  | Historian Interpretation 2: Bart Bernstein   |
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| <p>Historian Carl Degler argued that the New Deal was revolutionary. He believed that the New Deal represented a drastic change in how Americans viewed government and its role in the economy. Rather than expecting economic troubles to be solved by market forces (a faith in "laissez-faire economics"), Americans began to expect the government to act in times of economic trouble and intervene to help make things better.</p> <p>Degler saw Social Security as a piece of this change, signaling that Americans viewed the government as responsible for ensuring that older Americans would live decent lives. This was a shift from thinking that this responsibility lay only with individuals and families. The American public was ready for a change after experiencing the severe conditions during the Great Depression, when banks were failing, industries were faltering, and people were unemployed. Degler argued that the New Deal constituted a permanent shift in the American public's expectations: they now wanted the government to be an active player in the economy.</p> <p><i>Carl N. Degler, "The Third American Revolution," in Out of Our Past: The Forces that Shaped Modern America, 1959.</i></p> | <p>Historian Barton Bernstein, writing in the late 1960's, argued that the New Deal was no revolution, and that the changes suggested by Degler and others had been exaggerated. The New Deal was a narrow program of limited reform that excluded millions of Americans. Bernstein saw the New Deal as fundamentally a conservative program partly motivated by a fear of more radical ideas (like those proposed by Huey Long).</p> <p>Specifically, Bernstein saw the Social Security Act as more symbol than substance. Workers had to contribute to their old age pensions and could not depend on government contributions: thus, it was a limited kind of aid. More than one out of every five workers was excluded from the pension plan, including those who worked on farms and as domestic help, and this workforce was disproportionately black or female. Bernstein argued that while the New Deal reduced suffering, it did not deserve the praise for revolutionizing America that others lavished upon it.</p> <p><i>Barton Bernstein, "The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform," in Towards a New Past, 1968.</i></p> |
| <p><b>Summarize Degler's argument in your own words:</b></p>   | <p><b>Summarize Bernstein's argument in your own words:</b></p>  |