A Concise History of the New Deal

During the 1930s, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal carried out a program of dramatic reform to counter the unprecedented failures of the market economy exposed by the Great Depression. Contrary to the views of today’s conservative critics, this book argues that New Dealers were not “anticapitalist” in the ways in which they approached the problems confronting society. Rather, they were reformers who were deeply interested in fixing the problems of capitalism, if at times unsure of the best tools to use for the job. In undertaking their reforms, the New Dealers profoundly changed the United States in ways that still resonate today. Lively and engaging, this narrative history focuses on the impact of political and economic change on social and cultural relations.

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For Mary, Maria-Luisa, and Daniel
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Acknowledgments

My fascination with the New Deal and its response to the Great Depression began in earnest twenty-one years ago when I started graduate study at the University of California, Berkeley. With this book I have sought to combine my interest in these topics with a desire to make this period of history accessible to a general readership and to undergraduate and graduate students eager to learn more. Writing a narrative history has also presented the opportunity to reflect further on some of the themes of my earlier work, as well as on the history of capitalism more generally, particularly in light of the global financial collapse of 2008. I am grateful to a number of people and institutions for their help with this project; responsibility for remaining errors of fact and interpretation belongs to me.

My greatest intellectual debt is to the generations of scholars whose work I draw on for the analysis that supports my narrative. I refer readers to the “Essay on Sources” at the end of this book for a more detailed discussion of this wonderful body of work. At Cambridge University Press, I am grateful for the confidence and support of the Cambridge Essential Histories series editor, Donald Critchlow, as well as for the counsel of editors Eric Crahan and Lew Bateman. At the University of New Mexico, my colleagues in the History Department and throughout the College of Arts and Sciences have made UNM an intellectually interesting place.
to teach and study the past. Special thanks to Meg Frisbee, whose editorial talents and critical sense improved my prose. For providing challenging and helpful feedback along the way, I am particularly grateful to the students in my classes at Cornell University and the University of New Mexico.

Academia, some say, is like organized crime but without the loyalty. I am pleased to say this statement, in my experience, is not true. I owe a great deal to a number of colleagues at other institutions who have helped sharpen my thinking. Conversations with the late Thomas McCraw underscored the importance of viewing the New Deal as a crucial episode in the history of capitalism. Stephen Mihm read an early section of the manuscript and invited me to try out some of my ideas in posts for the Bloomberg View “Echoes” blog. Scott Myers-Lipton invited me to contribute a short piece on Obama and the New Deal to his volume *Rebuild America*. I am pleased to acknowledge the fascinating presentations by (and discussions with) Michael Bernstein, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, Alice O’Connor, and Julian Zelizer at the 2010 meeting of the American Historical Association, at a session I helped organize on what Barack Obama could learn from history. At Berkeley, Richard Walker extended a welcome invitation to participate in the conference “New Deal or No Deal? The Age of Obama and the Lessons of the 1930s,” as well as the opportunity to join the academic advisory board for The Living New Deal project. Thanks to a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, I was able to participate on a team of scholars, designers, and researchers working with the Northern California public television station KQED to develop an interactive history app for mobile devices, “The New Deal Murals of San Francisco.” This experience led me to think more deeply about how the public encounters the history of the Great Depression in today’s built environment. My thanks as well to Tony Badger for asking me to take part, with Louis Hyman, Jennifer Klein, and Gavin Wright, in a terrific session on the state of New Deal scholarship for the 2009 meeting of the Organization of American Historians. For thoughtful conversation and encouragement over the past several years, I also want to thank Brian Balogh, Ed Baptist, Sven Beckert,
Acknowledgments


For their love and support, I thank my sister, Sarah, my late father, Daniel, and my mother, Yvonne. I dedicate this book to my family: Mary, Maria-Luisa, and Daniel make every day a joy, and I love them more than words can express.