TEACHER'S GUIDE
PRIMARY SOURCE SET

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# The New Deal

In July of 1932, in the midst of the greatest economic crisis in U.S. history, Franklin D. Roosevelt accepted the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, promising "a new deal for the American people." That promise became a series of relief, recovery, and reform programs designed to provide assistance to the unemployed and poor, revive the economy, and change the financial system to prevent another depression.

A Young Man's Opportunity for Work, Play, Study & Health
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92513367

## Historical Background

The timeline below shows some major events related to the New Deal, beginning with its antecedents in the four years before Roosevelt's inauguration:

**1929**

In October, the stock market crashes, marking the beginning of the Great Depression.

**1930**

Unemployment grows from almost 4 million in January to 7 million in December.

President Herbert Hoover appoints the President's Emergency Committee for Employment to stimulate state and local relief (no funding for relief was provided the committee).

**1932**

Congress authorizes release of government surplus wheat and cotton for relief purposes.

Emergency Relief and Construction Act is passed. The Act provides funding to help state and local governments with their relief efforts.

Franklin D. Roosevelt is elected president in November.

**1933**

In the first two months of 1933, 4,004 banks fail. Unemployment reaches approximately 14 million (about 25 percent). FDR is inaugurated on March 4. The following day, he proclaims a four-day bank holiday. He calls a special session of Congress to begin March 9.

On the first day of its special session, Congress passes the Emergency Banking Act, which gives the president power over the banks. Within a few days, many banks reopen, lifting national spirits. Over the next 100 days, Congress enacts a number of laws creating New Deal programs.
These include:

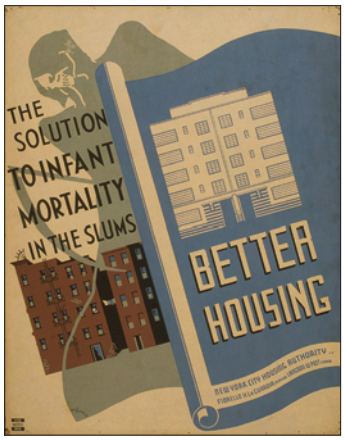
- The Reforestation Relief Act, establishing jobs for 250,000 young men in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). By the program's end in 1941, 2 million people will have worked on CCC projects.

- The Federal Emergency Relief Act, which provides funds to states for relief.

- The Agricultural Adjustment Act, establishing prices for farm products and paying subsidies to farmers, and the Farm Credit Act, providing agricultural loans.

- Tennessee Valley Authority Act, which creates the TVA to build dams and power plants.

- Federal Securities Act, which gives the executive branch the authority to regulate stocks and bonds.



Better housing: The solution to infant mortality in the slums
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98518522/

- Home Owners Refinancing Act, providing aid to homeowners in danger of losing their homes.

- National Industrial Recovery Act, which establishes the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the National Recovery Administration (NRA). The PWA provides employment in the building of roads and public buildings. The NRA regulates trade to stimulate competition.

- Banking Act of 1933, creating the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation to protect depositors' funds.

Roosevelt establishes the National Labor Board (NLB) to protect workers' rights to join unions to bargain collectively with employers.

**1934**

Congress continues to pass relief and reform legislation, including the Securities Exchange Act, which establishes the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to regulate sale of securities, and the National Housing Act, which establishes the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to provide insurance for loans needed to build or repair homes.

**1935**

Congress passes the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act, which funds the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to provide employment on "useful projects." Through June 1943, when the WPA ends, the program

will provide jobs for 8.5 million Americans with 30 million dependents.
The Supreme Court rules the NIRA unconstitutional.
Congress passes National Labor Relations Act, Social Security Act, Bank Act, Public Utilities Act, and Revenue Act. These acts provide a safety net for the elderly and disabled, authorize greater government regulation of banks and utility companies, and increase taxes on wealthier Americans.

Grand Canyon National Park, a free government service
http://loc.gov/pictures/item/2007676131/

**1936**

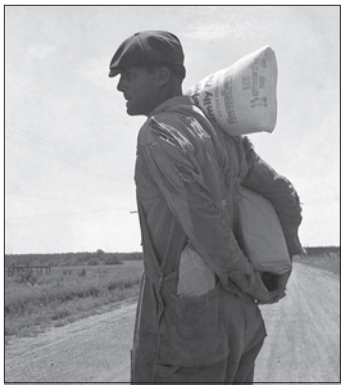
Supreme Court rules the Agricultural Adjustment Act unconstitutional.
Roosevelt is reelected.

**1937**

Roosevelt is inaugurated in January.
Thwarted by Supreme Court decisions, Roosevelt develops a plan to change the Court's composition. His proposal would add a judge for every justice who does not retire at age 70. The plan is not well received, even among Roosevelt supporters.
Supreme Court upholds National Labor Relations Act and Social Security Act.

**1938**

Congress passes Fair Labor Standards Act, which sets a minimum wage for workers and a maximum number of work hours. This is the last significant New Deal legislation.



Relief client near Oil City, OK
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000001300/PP/

Historians still debate whether the New Deal succeeded. Those who say it succeeded point out that economic indicators, while they did not return to pre-Depression levels, did bounce back significantly, and also point to the infrastructure created by WPA workers as a long-term benefit.

Critics point out that, while unemployment fell after 1933, it remained high. They argue that the New Deal did not provide long-term solutions and only the war ended the Depression. Furthermore, many critics feel the New Deal made changes in the government's role that were not a benefit to the nation.

## Suggestions for Teachers

This primary source set features a variety of documents produced by several New Deal agencies. The documents illustrate a variety of kinds of work funded by the agencies, as well as the types of social and economic problems that the programs either addressed or documented.

- Based on analysis of the documents in this primary source set, ask students to list agencies that were created as part of the New Deal. For each agency listed, what can they infer about its work from the documents and bibliographic information for each document? What problem(s) facing the country during the Great Depression did each agency appear to address? Encourage students to do research to evaluate whether their hypotheses about the work of the agencies were correct.

- One goal of the New Deal was to create. Writers and photographers were put to work documenting various aspects of American life. Encourage students to create a collage that depicts American life in the 1930s, using photos and quotations from the documents in this primary source set (and other documents available via American Memory if time permits). What does their collage convey about the time period? Did creating the collage help them understand the importance of documenting American life? Ask students to imagine that they have been appointed to administer a new WPA project. What aspects of American life today would they direct writers and photographers to document?

Drought-stricken farmer
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/90714876/

- The visually compelling posters created by WPA artists form a collection that provides insight into many aspects of American life in the 1930s. Ask students to choose one of the posters in the primary source set and analyze it in detail. Extend the activity by having students design a poster that could be used in the next decade of this century but addressing a similar issue as the poster they analyzed (e.g., public health, immigrant education) and employing a graphic element from the original WPA poster.

- Students may not be familiar with the way the word relief was used in the 1930s. Without defining the term, explain to students that relief was one goal of the New Deal. Assign students to use the documents in the primary source set to find out what relief meant in the 1930s, what forms it took, and how people responded to it.

## Additional Resources

**American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940**

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro/wpahome.html

**Farm Security Administration / Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives**

http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/

**Posters: WPA Posters**

http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/wpapos/

**Florida Folklife from the WPA Collections, 1937-1942**

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/florida/

## Primary Sources with Citations

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Lange, Dorothea, photographer. "Relief client Near Oil City, Oklahoma." Photograph. Washington, DC: Office of War Information, 1936. From Library of Congress: *America from the Great Depression to World War II: Black-and-White Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1935-1945.*
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"Grand Canyon National Park, a free government service." Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1938. From Library of Congress: *Posters: WPA Posters*
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Rothstein, Arthur, photographer. "Rehabilitation client repays loan. Smithfield, North Carolina." Photograph. Washington, DC: Office of War Information, 1936. From Library of Congress: *America from the Great Depression to World War II: Black-and-White Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1935-1945.*
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"Mount McKinley Headquarters, Superintendent's Residence, McKinley Station, AK" Photograph. Documentation compiled after 1940. From Library of Congress: *Built in America: Historic American Buildings Survey.*
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Sheer, Benjamin, artist. "Better Housing: The Solution to Infant Mortality in the Slums." Poster. New York: Federal Art Project, 1936. From Library of Congress: *Posters: WPA Posters*
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"Workers service program ... Rockford, Illinois" Chicago: Federal Art Project, 1941. From Library of Congress: *Posters: WPA Posters*
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"'Help your-self': A 3 Act Comedy." Poster. California: Federal Art Project, 1937. From Library of Congress: *Posters: WPA Posters*
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Lachenmann, Robert, artist. "Don't mix 'em." Poster. Pennsylvania: Federal Art Project, 1936 or 1937. From Library of Congress: *Posters: WPA Posters*
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Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer. "Bayou Bourbeau plantation, a FSA cooperative, Natchitoches, La. A Negro family (?) seated on the porch of a house " Photograph. Washington, DC: Office of War Information, 1940. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Color Photographs*
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Vachon, John, photographer. "PWA (Public Works Administration) Housing Projects for Negroes. Omaha, Nebraska." Photograph. Washington, DC: Office of War Information, 1938. From Library of Congress: *America from the Great Depression to World War II: Black-and-White Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1935-1945.*
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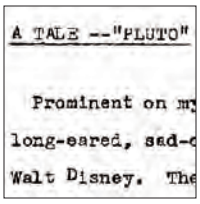
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West, Dorothy, FWP worker. "Pluto." Life history. 1938. From Library of Congress: *American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940.*
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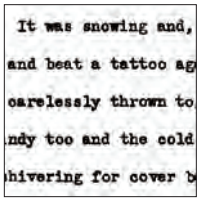
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Byrd, Frank, FWP worker. Life history. "Afternoon in a Pushcart Peddlers' Colony." 1938. From Library of Congress: *American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940.*

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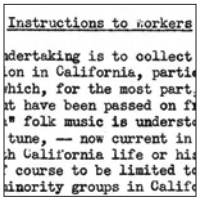
Instructions to Workers
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Cowell, Sidney Robertson, author. "Instructions to WPA Staff." Manuscript. 1940. From Library of Congress: *California Gold: Northern California Folk Music from the Thirties.*

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