

## DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints  
in Primary Source Documents

# The New Deal Did It Work?

*Did FDR's vast array of reforms pull America out of  
the Great Depression of the 1930s?*



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# Teacher Introduction

## ★ *Using Primary Sources*

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,  
conflicting  
perspectives are  
among the truths  
of history.  
No single  
objective or  
universal account  
could ever put an  
end to this endless  
creative dialogue  
within and  
between the past  
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct of the Council of the American Historical Association.

## INTRODUCTION

### ★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

#### **Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes**

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

### ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

#### **1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.**

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

#### **2. Have students do the worksheets.**

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

### 3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

### 4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

#### **The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):**

“The Great Depression lasted a decade while New Deal program after program failed to do anything to end it.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

## INTRODUCTION

### ★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

#### **Excellent Essay**

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

#### **Good Essay**

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

#### **Fair Essay**

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

#### **Poor Essay**

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

# Suggestions to the Student

## ★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

## ★ *How to Use This Booklet*

### 1. **Read the one-page introductory essay.**

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



### 2. **Study the primary source documents for this lesson.**

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

### 3. **Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.**

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

### 4. **As a class, debate the documents.**

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

### 5. **Do the final DBQ.**

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

## *The New Deal: Did It Work?*

The dramatic crash of the stock market in October 1929 did not cause the Great Depression. Many factors helped bring on that catastrophe. However, the crash was still the start of hard times for thousands of ordinary Americans. Industrial production plummeted. By 1933, about one-fourth of all workers could not find a job. Unemployment remained high until 1941, by which time wartime demand finally began lifting the nation out of depression.

The great stock market boom of the late 1920s was based on optimistic expectations that prosperity would keep pushing stock prices up almost automatically. The Great Depression, by arriving on the heels of this age of abundance, was a huge shock and a trauma.

Yet the nation did rally. Millions of people coped with and triumphed over the hard times more or less on their own. Private charities, as well as local and state public officials, did what they could to help out. However, what made the age a turning point in the nation's history was the huge new role the federal government took on in regulating the economy and providing relief for society's weakest members.

The short-hand term for this change is the "New Deal." It was during his campaign for president in 1932 that Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) first promised Americans a "new deal." The phrase came to stand for the dozens of federal programs and plans Roosevelt came up with during his long presidency (1933–1945). These all amounted to a vast and varied public effort to cope with the Great Depression, get the economy moving again, and make the reforms necessary to prevent a repeat of the disaster.

Historians traditionally divide the New Deal into three overlapping efforts—*relief* programs offering immediate help to millions; *recovery* programs aimed at getting the economy growing again; and *reform* programs seeking to change the market system and provide new government controls to keep it running smoothly.

In the *relief* category were programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) or the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which created government jobs for unemployed millions. In the *recovery* category were efforts such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) or the National Recovery Administration (NRA). The AAA paid farmers to limit crop production in order to raise farm prices. The NRA asked industries to write codes setting higher prices and wages as a way to raise industry profits and worker purchasing power. In the category of *reform* were the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the Wagner Act. The FDIC insured bank deposits and helped save the banking system. The Wagner Act guaranteed labor's right to form unions to bargain for better wages and working conditions.

Some New Deal programs were actually started by President Herbert Hoover, before Roosevelt took office. Nevertheless, the decade was dominated by one man, FDR. To some he was a great hero. To others he was a misguided, even dangerous meddler.

Yet both the praise and the criticism of FDR and the New Deal may be somewhat overblown. The New Deal's impact in the 1930s is actually hard to measure. Slow economic growth and high unemployment remained problems throughout the decade. Some see this as conclusive evidence that the New Deal was a failure. Yet in time, the economy finally did revive—during World War II, and for most of the time since then. In the long-run, the New Deal drastically changed the role of the federal government in the nation's economic life.

Debates about both the short-run and long-run impact of the New Deal still divide historians and others. The documents for this lesson will help you begin to take part in that ongoing and still vital debate.

# The New Deal Time Line

**1932** • • •

At the Democratic National Convention Roosevelt says, "I pledge you, I pledge myself, a new deal for the American people." FDR and the Democrats win the election by a landslide.

In March, FDR takes office. Declares a "bank holiday." Calls Congress into special session for the famous "Hundred Days" to enact many New Deal programs. These include: the Emergency Banking Act (banks can reopen once inspected); the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC); emergency relief grants to states for relief projects; the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA); the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to build dams and power plants in the Tennessee Valley; the Federal Securities Act to regulate stocks and bonds; the National Recovery Administration (NRA), and the Public Works Administration (PWA) to build dams, roads, etc. Later in the year, Congress passes the Farm Credit Act and the Banking Act of 1933 (creating the FDIC). In November, FDR sets up the Civil Works Administration (CWA) to provide work for four million over the winter months.

**1933** • • •

**1934** • • •

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is established to regulate securities sales. The Farm Mortgage Foreclosure Act gives loans to farmers to regain property lost to foreclosures. The National Housing Act insures loans to build or repair homes.

**1935** • • •

Five billion dollars is set aside for relief and employment, including through the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The Resettlement Administration (RA) is set up to help farm families relocate and get loans. The Rural Electrification Administration helps bring electricity to rural areas. The Supreme Court rules the NRA unconstitutional. This is the first of several Supreme Court decisions against FDR's programs. FDR signs the National Labor Relations Act protecting labor's right to organize unions. The Social Security Act creates pensions for those retiring at 65 based on taxes paid by both employees and employers. This law also provides welfare aid and a system of unemployment insurance. The Revenue Act increases taxes on inheritances, gifts, and wealthier individuals.

**1936** • • •

The Supreme Court rules that the AAA is an unconstitutional attempt to control production. Roosevelt defeats Alfred M. Landon in a landslide reelection victory.

**1937** • • •

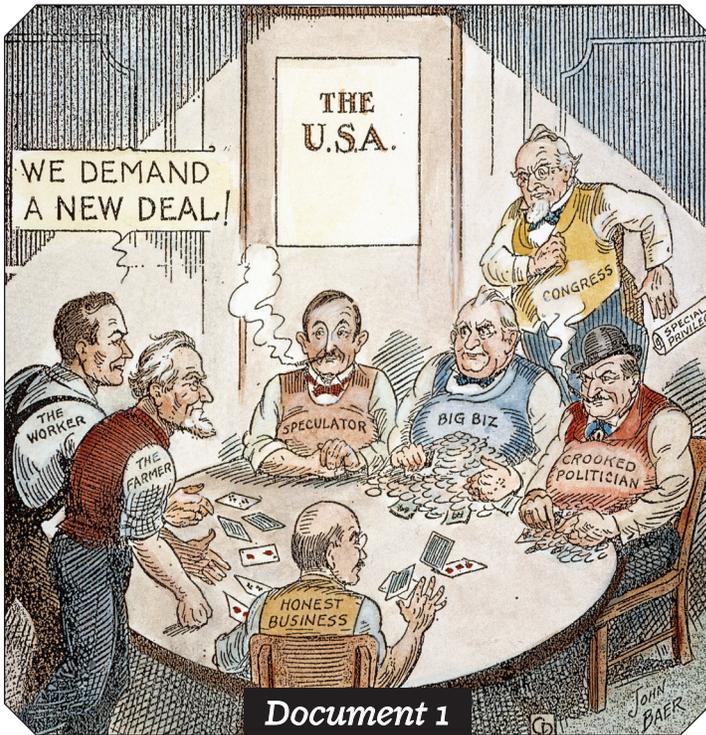
FDR says the Supreme Court is "thwarting the will of the nation." He proposes adding one new Supreme Court justice for every current one who refuses to retire after age of 70. This plan to "pack the court" angers the public. However, the Court soon starts ruling in favor of New Deal programs, as with the National Labor Relations Act and Social Security. A mini-depression within the Great Depression sets in, sending unemployment back up from its Roosevelt-era low (by one estimate) of 14.3% to 19%.

**1938–1939** • • •

Aside from a Fair Labor Standards Act (providing for a minimum wage) and a new Agricultural Adjustment Act, few other New Deal laws are passed. In his speeches, President Roosevelt shifts his emphasis to the increasingly tense world situation.

DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

# Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



The Granger Collection, New York



The Granger Collection, New York

## Information on Documents 1 & 2

**Document 1** is a 1932 editorial cartoon by John Baer captioned, “We Demand a New Deal!” The term “New Deal” was first used by Franklin D. Roosevelt in his speech accepting the Democratic nomination for President, on July 2, 1932.

**Document 2** is a poster about Social Security. It was issued in 1935 by the Social Security Board urging citizens to take advantage of the recently passed Social Security Act.