

Uses of Depression Era Documents

Newspapers

Have students compare the three front pages from the Burlington (NC) Daily Times, The New York Times, and the Frederick (MD) Post. Note that these are all from the same date, October 30, 1929, the day after the Stock Market Crash. Ask students to examine how much attention is given to the crash by the Burlington paper compared to the New York and Frederick papers. Point out that Frederick is located close to Washington, D.C. Note that the only reference in the North Carolina paper is a small notice quoting someone who “expressed the opinion that the recent decline will have only a temporary effect on general business conditions.” Lead students to think about why Washington and Frederick would be more concerned about this issue than Burlington. Points of discussion might include how many North Carolinians in the 1920s were invested in the stock market and where were the financial centers in the country located at that time?

Discussing New Deal Programs

Divide students into groups and provide each group with the following:

One or more documents

A list of New Deal Programs (found at the end of this document)

Copies of the photographs numbered one through seven.

Have students read their documents and do the following:

Summarize the document: who wrote it and what was their purpose in writing it.

Look at the list of New Deal programs and determine which program the document relates to most closely.

Look at the photographs and decide which photo most likely is associated with the document.

The documents include:

Two excerpts from slave narratives. As part of the exercise you may encourage students to think about how the tone of the two letters differ. Point out that interviews were done by different people but they were most likely white people interviewing former slaves. Ask how this might affect the willingness of the interview subject to be forthcoming. These documents relate to the WPA Writers Project. Photo 2 is a former slave.

A telegram to Sen. Josiah Bailey from Gov. JCB Ehringhaus expressing concern that the Hiwassee Dam project slated for North Carolina is in danger of being eliminated. This relates to the TVA and photo 1 is of the Hiwassee Dam. (Obviously the project was eventually completed).

A letter from the general manager of Butters Lumber Company expressing displeasure that a CCC camp in the area will be occupied by African American men. There is also a

reply (out of order on the pdf) from the director of the CCC to Gov. Ehringhaus stating the reasons for the decision to put the camp there. These documents are good for leading a discussion of race relations in the 30s. Have students examine what Gen. Moseley says about the leadership of the camps. These documents relates to the CCC and are associated with photo 3.

Two letters between the Governor's Office and Fred Wiegand of Alabama inquiring about the North Carolina Symphony. Employing out of work musicians was another program of the WPA. A few years after these letters were written, the North Carolina General Assembly passed a bill providing some state funding for the symphony. Photograph 4 depicts a symphony practice from the era.

A letter from the secretary of the Hominy Valley Pure Bred Hog Club expressing his views on the need for and obstacles to rural electrification. This bill relates to the REA and is associated with photo 6.

Two letters to Gov. Ehringhaus regarding the National Recovery Act. One is from a dairy worker who expresses his concern over his employers failure to join the NRA and the hardships it will cause. The second letter is from a factory manager who expresses his concern over the hardships he believes will occur if they must participate in the NRA. These documents provide an opportunity for debate on the issue. Photograph 5 depicts the NRA sign displayed by participating businesses.

Photograph 7 is a chart showing Federal Emergency Relief work in North Carolina. The entire report of the Emergency Relief Agency may be downloaded at Documenting the American South <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/emergencyrelief/menu.html> You may assign parts of the document for your students to read.

The final document contains the words and associated questions for the song "Brother Can You Spare a Dime." Students may listen to the song by viewing the Authentic History Center web site at <http://www.authentichistory.com/1930s/music/1932-Brother Can You Spare a Dime.html>

Act or Program	Acronym	Year Enacted	Significance
Agricultural Adjustment Act	AAA	1933	Protected farmers from price drops by providing crop subsidies to reduce production, educational programs to teach methods of preventing soil erosion.
Civil Works Administration	CWA	1933	Provided public works jobs at \$15/week to four million workers in 1934.
Civilian Conservation Corps	CCC	1933	Sent 250,000 young men to work camps to perform reforestation and conservation tasks. Removed surplus of workers from cities, provided healthy conditions for boys, provided money for families.
Federal Emergency Relief Act	FERA	1933	Distributed millions of dollars of direct aid to unemployed workers.
Glass-Steagall Act	FDIC	1933	Created federally insured bank deposits (\$2500 per investor at first) to prevent bank failures.
National Industrial Recovery Act	NIRA	1933	Created NRA to enforce codes of fair competition, minimum wages, and to permit collective bargaining of workers.
National Youth Administration	NYA	1935	Provided part-time employment to more than two million college and high school students.
Public Works Administration	PWA	1933	Received \$3.3 billion appropriation from Congress for public works projects.
Rural Electrification Administration	REA	1935	Encouraged farmers to join cooperatives to bring electricity to farms. Despite its efforts, by 1940 only 40% of American farms were electrified.
Securities and Exchange Commission	SEC	1934	Regulated stock market and restricted margin buying.
Social Security Act		1935	Response to critics (Dr. Townsend and Huey Long), it provided pensions, unemployment insurance, and aid to blind, deaf, disabled, and dependent children.
Tennessee Valley Authority	TVA	1933	Federal government build series of dams to prevent flooding and sell electricity. First public competition with private power industries
Wagner Act	NLRB	1935	Allowed workers to join unions and outlawed union-busting tactics by management.
Works Progress Administration	WPA	1935	Employed 8.5 million workers in construction and other jobs, but more importantly provided work in arts, theater, and literary projects.

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