The New Deal Debate (A Graded Discussion)

**Instructions:** You will be assigned a role to play along with a small group, representing one of the many interest groups which would have had a strong opinion on the achievements and/or limitations of the New Deal. You and your group members will be serving as representatives to a congressional hearing about the status of the New Deal and its effectiveness in ending the Depression.

What you need to do is prepare a report to deliver to the members of Congress explaining why you do or do not support the New Deal. To do this, you will use the following information:

- What is covered in the textbook;
- The quotation sheet given to your group.

**Your presentation should include the following:**

- Opening statement, explaining whether or not your group feels the New Deal has benefited the nation and why (½ a page written);
- Five major points /arguments in favor of your position, including specific references to New Deal programs, from the perspective of your group;
- At least two questions to ask of the other groups, that either asks them for information to support and/or clarify your position, or to ask them to respond to an attack that you would like to make on them;
- Closing statement, explaining what course of action should be taken by Congress—for example, should the New Deal be continued? Should it be amended or changed? Or should it just be scrapped altogether? What reasoning supports your assertion?

**THE GROUPS:**

Women | African Americans | Roosevelt & His Cabinet | Liberals | Conservatives | White Men

*Your participation (including both prep work and participation) in this assignment is worth 25 points.*
WOMEN

“During the depression it was customary for married women to be fired. In several states, all married schoolteachers, university professors, and hospital workers were fired. Within two years, thousands of women in government service were dismissed. Home mortgages were foreclosed; life savings were lost. The formerly working wives and children of army and navy personnel went on relief.

FDR's First 100 Days did nothing for an estimated 140,000 homeless women and girls who wandered U.S. streets and railroad sidings. New programs ignored the needs of almost four million unemployed women. The plight of single, divorced, and widowed women was also ignored.

Dismayed that no specific program existed to alleviate the suffering of women, Eleanor Roosevelt sponsored a White House Conference on the Emergency Needs of Women in November 1933. Harry Hopkins estimated that over 400,000 women required immediate help from FERA or CWA. Only 50,000 women were actually on relief. Hopkins promised to increase that eightfold within twenty-five days. But he needed imaginative advice about available work and tasks suitable for women's special needs. FERA projects could not compete with the private sector, and men had decided women were too "weak" to work outdoors or on construction projects. Women with families could not travel as men could and were limited to work in their own communities.

Within two months, under Ellen Sullivan Woodward's direction of the Women's Division of FERA, over 300,000 women were employed. By January 1934 every state relief administrator received sixty job descriptions and was ordered to hire a women's division coordinator to recruit women of all races and backgrounds. Projects were created in canning and gardening, public libraries, and schools. Desperately needed social services were provided across the economic spectrum. But women's reemployment was slow, sporadic, inadequate. By 1938, 372,000 women had WPA (Works Progress Administration) jobs, but over three million women remained unemployed; almost two million women suffered the insufficiency of part-time work.

Over 25 percent of the women employed by FERA and WPA agencies were professionals: teachers, athletic directors, artists, photographers, librarians, nurses, performers, musicians, technicians, and administrators. The vast majority were unskilled and reemployed in domestic services, mattress and bedding projects, surplus cotton projects, or sewing and craft projects. Wage differentials prevailed.

In the Civilian Conservation Corps, relief administrators refused to allow women "outside" work and prohibited them from reforestation and environmental projects. Discrimination in salaries and all benefits continued. CCC men received a wage of one dollar a day; camp women received "an allowance" of fifty cents a week. The camps were not racially segregated, although ninety percent of the campers were white. Arrangements to include widows and young married women with children were discussed but never materialized.

Social Security's most enduring provisions involved old-age and unemployment insurance programs that workers would pay for out of their own salaries. These provisions favored male workers and essentially limited coverage to white industrial workers. Agricultural and domestic workers were excluded from the coverage, as were workers in nonprofit organizations, self-employment, small businesses, and other sectors—including laundry workers, seamen, and educational and government workers. As a result, over 80 percent of Black women workers were not covered and only half the work force was included.”

(Historian Blanche Wiesen Cook)
AFRICAN AMERICANS

“All the prosperity he has brought to the country has been legislated and is not real. Nothing he has ever started has been finished. My common way of expressing it is that we are in the middle of the ocean like a ship without an anchor. No good times can come to the country as long as there is so much discrimination practiced … Take me: I have applied for work at the welfare office, tried hard to get work. All they had for me, they said, came under the unskilled head. I tried one of these jobs—digging ditches for the sanitary department of the board of health. With my artificial limb, I simply couldn’t compete with the other men who were digging ditches … Then I applied again for work, for something in the skilled labor line. I had seen men overseeing groups of workers, keeping their time, and so forth, and this I knew I could do as well as anybody. They told me that only white men had these jobs, that I would have to take something in the unskilled classification or none … Because of my color, I must ditch or work on the road, in spite of my college training and in spite of physical handicaps from amputation and high blood pressure … I don’t think that discrimination is intended at Washington, but here in this country the colored race has no chance to get a job when it’s a choice between colors. I don’t see much chance for our people to get anywhere when the color line instead of ability determines the opportunities to get ahead economically.” (Sam T. Mayhew [African American])

“Although there has been but little increase in complete displacement of tenants in the South, the fact that they are remaining is not deeply significant. In many instances landlords are willing to allow their former tenants to live in houses and cabins (for which there are no other possible occupants at this time). The already exploited Negro is rendered more important to resist unfair treatment by this peculiar situation. Thus, it is the inability to secure a crop—the contract which provides for advances of seeds, subsistence and equipment, rather than physical displacement—that is most crucial. The tenant in the South—and the Negro tenant in particular—is being separated from his means of living.” (Congressional Information Service, 1937)

“The report of the Joint Committee on National Recovery on Negro workers under the NRA presents evidence that many provisions in the codes have been, in effect, discriminatory against black workers. It lists three major devices which have had that effect. The first is the occupational differential … Article 7A of the Act declares that ‘employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing’ and shall not be restrained from joining any labor organization with which they wish to affiliate themselves … If unions persist in discriminating and often excluding colored workers from their membership, the new trend of events will translate such action into the exclusion of Negro workers from all desirable jobs in areas where labor is well-organized. Unless specific safeguards are set up, Negro wage earners will suffer.” (Congressional Information Service, 1934)

“The Negro was born in depression. It didn’t mean too much to him, The Great American Depression, as you call it. There was no such thing. The best he could be is a janitor or a porter or shoeshine boy. It only became official when it hit the white man. It you can tell me the difference between the depression today and the Depression of 1932 for a black man, I’d like to know it. … You take a fella had a job paying him $60, and here I am making $25. If I go home taking beans to me wife, we’ll eat it. It isn’t exactly what we want, but we’ll eat it. The white man that’s been making big money, he’s taking bean home, his wife’ll say: Get out.” (Laughs) (Clifford Burke, 1969)
**ROOSEVELT AND HIS CABINET**

“At the beginning of the New Deal, they called it a revolution. Then they began to say it wasn’t a revolution … What really happened was a revolution in point of view. We backed into the Twentieth Century describing our actual economy in terms of the small enterprises in the Nineteenth Century. We were an economy of huge corporations, with a high degree of concentrated control. It was an economy that was in no sense described by classical theory. What Roosevelt and the New Deal did was to turn about and face the realities … A hundred years from now, when historians look back on it, they will say a big corner was turned. People agreed that old things didn’t work. What ran through the whole New Deal was finding a way to make things work. Before that, Hoover would loan money to farmers to keep their mules alive, but wouldn’t loan money to keep their children alive. This was perfectly right within the framework of classical thinking. If an individual couldn’t get enough to eat, it was because he wasn’t on the ball. It was his responsibility. The New Deal said: Anybody who is unemployed isn’t necessarily unemployed because he’s shiftless … Talking a couple of days ago with a couple of old New Dealers, we agreed it was a very exhilarating period. There was no question in our minds we were saving the country.”

(Gardiner C. Means [government financial adviser during New Deal])

“In its brief span of life FERA received and spent $4,000,000,000 on all projects. It was the first step in the economic pump priming that was to break the back of the depression. FERA spent money for many things, all necessities of life—food, clothing, fuel, shelter, medicine. In an analysis of how the money was spent, Harry Hopkins said, “We can only say that out of every dollar entrusted to us for lessening of distress, the maximum amount humanly possible was put into the people's hands. The money, spent honestly and with constant remembrance of its purpose, bought more courage than it ever bought of goods.” Thus the relief program was launched. While even its most enthusiastic sponsors never thought it was the complete answer, it kept people alive and instilled courage. In looking back, moreover, one sees that it provided a substantial stimulus to the revival of industry by creating purchasing power in a class previously destitute, and that it had a tremendous effect on raising the standards of living of the poorest and lowest paid people.” (Frances Perkins [Roosevelt’s Secretary of Labor], 1946)

“Let us now and here highly resolve to resume the country’s march along the path of real progress, of real justice, of real equality for all of our citizens, great and small … There are two ways of viewing the Government's duty in matters affecting economic and social life. The first sees to it that a favored few are helped and hopes that some of their prosperity to will leak through, sift through, to labor, to the farmer, to the small business man … My program is based upon this simple moral principle: the welfare and soundness of the Nation depend first upon what the great mass of people wish and need; and second, whether or not they are getting it. What do people of American want more than anything else? To my mind, they want two things: work, with all the moral and spiritual values that go with it; and with work, a reasonable measure of security—security for themselves and for their wives and children. Work and security—these are more than words. They are more than facts. They are the spiritual values, the true goal toward which our efforts of reconstruction should lead. These are the values that this program is intended to gain.” (FDR, 1932)

“The word ‘Deal’ implied that the Government itself was going to use affirmative action to bring about its avowed objectives rather than stand by and hope that general economic laws alone would attain them. The word ‘New’ implied that a new order of things designed to benefit the great mass of our farmers, workers and business men would replace the old order of special privilege in a Nation which was completely and thoroughly disgusted with the existing dispensation. The New Deal was fundamentally intended as a modern expression of ideals set forth one hundred and fifty years ago in the Preamble of the Constitution—‘a more perfect union, justice, domestic tranquility, the common defense, the general welfare and the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.’ But we were no to be content with merely hoping for these ideals. We were to use the instrumentalities and powers of government actively to fight for them.” (FDR, 1938)
**LIBERALS**

“Socialists and extreme liberals in the Democratic party criticized the New Deal (especially the first New Deal of 1933 – 1934) for doing too much for business and too little for the unemployed and the working poor. They charged that the president failed to address the problems of ethnic minorities, women, and the elderly.” (Historian John J. Newman)

“The American people today face the greatest crisis since the Civil War. Extreme reaction threatens the country, driving toward Fascism and a new world war … The collapse of the Hoover-Republican prosperity destroyed our boasted American standards of living. The New Deal failed to protect and restore our living standards. American capitalism is unable to provide the American people with the simply necessities of life. Over 12,000,000 able-bodied and willing workers are without jobs. For a majority of these there is no hope of jobs. The income of the working people has been cut in half. Half our farmers have lost their land. They are converted into a pauperized peasantry … The Negro people suffer doubly. Most exploited of working people, they are also victims of jim-crowism and lynching. They are denied the right to live as human beings. Roosevelt is bitterly attacked by the camp of reaction. But he does not fight back these attacks. Roosevelt compromises. He grants small concessions to the working people, while making big concessions to Wall Street … Our land is the richest in the world. It has the largest and most skilled working class. Everything is present to provide a rich and cultured life for the whole population. Yet millions starve. The whole nation suffers, because capitalism is breaking down, because profits are the first law and are put above human needs—and the capitalist rulers are turning to Fascism and war.” (Communist Party Platform of 1936)

“When the New Deal was over, capitalism remained intact. The rich still controlled the nation’s wealth, as well as its laws, courts, police, newspapers, churches, colleges. Enough help had been given to enough people to make Roosevelt a hero to millions, but the same system that had brought depression and crisis—the system of waste, of inequality, of concern for profit over human need—remained.” (Historian Howard Zinn, 1980)

“The disparity between the New Deal’s popular image and its actual accomplishments remains one of the unappreciated aspects of the Roosevelt era. To cite specifics: the Civilian Conservation Corps provided jobs at subsistence wages for 250,000 out of 15 million unemployed persons. At its peak, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) reached about one in four unemployed, often with work of unstable duration and wages below the already inadequate ones of private industry. Of the 12 million workers in interstate commerce who were earning less than forty cents an hour, only about a half million were reached by the minimum wage law. The Social Security Act of 1935 made retirement benefits payable only in 1942 and thereafter, covering but half the population and providing no medical insurance and no protection against illness before retirement … By 1940, the last year of peace, the number of ill-clothed, ill-fed, and ill-housed American showed no substantial decrease. Unemployment continued as a major problem. And the level of consumption and national income was lower than in 1929 … Only by entering the war and remaining thereafter on a permanent war economy was the United States able to maintain a shaky ‘prosperity’ and significantly lower the Depression era unemployment.” (Historian Michael Paranti, 1980)

“Our attitude toward Government is wrong. We look upon Government as something entirely foreign to ourselves; as something over which we have no control, and which we cannot expect to do us a great deal of good. We do not realize that it can do us infinite harm, except when we pay our taxes. But the fact is, we must learn to expect and demand that the central Government assume the duty of regulating business activity. When business begins to slow down and capital shows signs of timidity, stimulus must be provided by the National Government in the form of additional capital. When times are good and begin to show signs of a speculative debauch such as we saw in 1929, the brakes must be applied through a reduction of circulation medium. This function of the Government could be easily established and maintained through the pension system for the aged.” (Dr. Francis E. Townsend, 1933)

“There is nothing wrong with the United States. We have more food than we can eat. We have more clothes and things out of which to make clothes than we can wear. We have more houses and lands than the whole 120 million can use if they all had good homes. So what is the trouble? Nothing except that a handful of men have everything and the balance of the people have nothing if their debts were paid. There should be every man a king in this land flowing with milk and honey instead of the lords of finance at the top and slaves and peasants at the bottom … "Every man a king" conveys the great plan of God and of the Declaration of Independence, which said: "All men are created equal." It conveys that no one man is the lord of another, but that from the head to the foot of every man is carried his sovereignty.” (Huey Long)
CONSERVATIVES

“The first New Deal was a radical departure from American life. It put more power in the central Government. At the time, it was necessary, especially in the farm area of our economy. Left to itself, farming was in a state of anarchy. Beyond that, there was no need to reorganize in industry. We merely needed to get the farms prospering again and create a market for the industrial products in the cities. The second New Deal was an entirely different thing. My disenchantment began then. Roosevelt didn’t follow any particular policy after 1936. Our economy began to slide downhill—our unemployment increased—after that, until 1940. This is something liberals are not willing to recognize. It was the war that saved the economy and saved Roosevelt … [Roosevelt] began to bring in the radical elements, who up to that time had not been in support of him. Business went along with his in his early reforms, but after 1937, it began to be nervous about where he was going. He was improvising all the time. Hit or miss … In 1935, I took a firm stand. I said welfare is a narcotic, because it will never end. We’ll have to stop this business and put people to work. The best way to put people to work is to encourage the development of industrial science. The Government can’t put people to work.” (Raymond Moley [one of Roosevelt’s original Brain Trust])

“More numerous were those on the right who attacked the New Deal for giving the federal government too much power. These critics charged that relief programs such as the WPA and labor laws such as the Wagner Act bordered on socialism or even communism. Business leaders were alarmed by (1) increased regulations, (2) the second New Deal’s pro-union stance, and (3) the financing of government programs by means of borrowed money—a practice known as deficit financing. Conservative Democrats, including former presidential candidates Alfred E. Smith and John W. Davis, joined with leading Republicans to form an anti-New Deal organization called the American Liberty League. Its avowed purpose was the stop the New Deal from “subverting” the U.S. economic and political system.” (Historian John J. Newman)

“America is in peril. The welfare of American men and women and the future of our youth are at stake. We dedicate ourselves to the preservation of their political liberty, their individual opportunity and their character as free citizens, which today for the first time are threatened by Government itself. For three long years the New Deal Administration has dishonored American traditions and flagrantly betrayed the pledges upon which the Democratic Party sought and received public support. The powers of Congress have been usurped by the President. The integrity and authority of the Supreme Court has been flouted. The rights and liberties of American citizens have been violated. Regulated monopoly has replaced free enterprise. The New Deal Administration consistently seeks to usurp the rights reserved to the States and to the people. It has insisted on the passage of laws contrary to the Constitution… It has created a vast multitude of new offices, filled them with its favorites, set up a centralized bureaucracy, and set out swarms of inspectors to harass our people.” (Republican Party Platform of 1936)

“The New Deal hurt our country a great deal. Our economy was in bad shape in 1932, but the New Deal only made matters worse in the long run. The Roosevelt Administration allowed intellectuals and socialists into the government, and these men used their positions to interfere with the normal functioning of the economy. There was too much experimentation—the New Deal confused action with progress. One of the biggest problems created by the New Deal was an expanding bureaucracy. The federal government got much larger, which led to many of the problems we have today—waste, corruption, inefficiency, and high taxes. Our national debt rose from $19 billion in 1932 to $40 billion in 1939. People started thinking that America was a “Handout State” that could use unlimited spending to cure problems. The giveaway programs are continuing to ruin the moral fiber of America; people do not want to work when they are taken care of by the government. The New Deal also created class jealousies. Businessmen felt that all kinds of regulations were put on them, while workers and farmers were pampered. They felt private enterprise was being strangled by creeping socialism. One of the biggest criticisms of the New Deal, however, is that it did not do what it set out to do—it did not get the country out of the Depression. In 1938 the economy was still sick—with a low GNP and high unemployment. It remained for World War II to get us out of the Depression.” (A Random Historian)
WHITE MEN

“I do think that Roosevelt is the biggest-hearted man we ever had in the White House … It’s the first time in my recollection that a President ever got up and said, “I’m interested in and aim to do somethin’ for the workin’ man.” Just knowin’ that for once in the time of the country they was a man to stand up and speak for him, a man that could make what he felt so plain nobody could doubt he meant it, has made a lot of us feel a sight better even when they wasn’t mu

much to eat in our homes. Roosevelt picked us up out of the mud and stood us up but whenever he turns us loose I’m afraid we’re goin’ to fall and go deeper in the mud than we was before … Roosevelt is the only President we ever had that thought the Constitution belonged to the pore man too … Yessir, it took Roosevelt to read in the Constitution and find out them folks way back younder that made it was talkin’ about the pore man right along with the rich one. I am a Roosevelt man.” (George Dobbin [mill worker], 1939)

“America hasn’t been as happy in the three years as they are today. No money, no banks, no work, no nothing, but they know they got a man in the White House who is wise to Congress, wise to our big bankers and wise to our so-called big men. The whole country is with him. Even if what he does is wrong, they are with him. Just so he does something. If he burned down the Capitol, we would cheer him and say, Well, at least he got a fire started, anyhow. We have years of ‘Don’t rock the boat!’ Sink it, Mr. President. We just as well be swimming, as like the way we are.” (Will Rogers [humorist], 1933)

“Although hated in conservative circles as an expropriator and a fomenter of class antagonisms, Roosevelt in fact attempted to created a real balance between various class interests, such as those of labor and those of management; and this balance was predicated on an idea which was the very antithesis of class struggle—the idea that no one need lose anything: debts were not scaled down, mortgages were not cancelled, imminent bankruptcies which would have paved the way for nationalization were not permitted to occur … At the nadir of the Depression when capitalism was fearfully vulnerable and almost unresisting to attack and when many doctrinaires would have said that the overthrow of capitalism was the prerequisite to reform, Roosevelt unhesitatingly assumed that the country could afford to pay capitalism’s ransom and buy reform, too.” (Historian David M. Potter, 1954)

“Almost every one of the best-known measures of the federal government during the depression era made inroads into the hitherto private preserves of business and the individual. Furthermore, most of these measures survived the period, taking their places as fundamental elements in the structure of American life. For modern Americans living under a federal government of transcendent influence and control in the economy, this is the historic meaning of the Great Depression. Much of what is taken for granted today as the legitimate function of government and the social responsibility of business began only with the legislation of those turbulent years.” (Historian Carl N. Degler, 1970)

“After the New Deal the federal government accepted its obligation to try to provide all people with a decent standard of living and to pay some attention to achieving the Jeffersonian goal of happiness for all. If the New Deal failed to end the depression, it effected changes that have—so far, at least—prevented later economic declines from becoming catastrophes.” (Historians John A. Garraty and Robert A. McCaughey, 1987)

“Few New Yorkers today realize the long reach of the New Deal. If they cross the Triborough Bridge, they are driving on a bridge the PWA built. If they fly into La Guardia airport, they are landing at an airfield laid out by the WPA. If they get caught in a traffic jam on FDR Drive, they are using yet another artery built by the WPA. Even the animal cages in Central Park Zoo were reconstructed by WPA workers. In New York City, the WPA built or renovated hundreds of school buildings; gave Orchard Beach a bathhouse; a mall, and a lagoon; landscaped Bryant Park and the campus of Hunter College in the Bronx; conducted examinations for venereal disease, filled teeth, operated pollen count stations, and performed puppet shows for disturbed children … Over the whole performance lies the dark cloud of the persistence of hard times. The shortcomings of the New Deal are formidable, and they must recognized. But I am not persuaded that the New Deal experience was negligible. Indeed, it is hard to think of another period in the whole history of the republic that was so fruitful or of a crisis that was met with as much imagination.” (William Leuchtenburg, historian)