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FDR's Second New Deal - More Jobs

"Government needs to mind its own business!" That's what some people said about the New Deal. Some thought Roosevelt's policies were meddling in private enterprise. Others felt that the New Deal gave government too much power. New Deal programs were known by their acronyms-CCC, NIRA, FERA, AAA, and the like. Some people called the New Deal laws "alphabet soup."

But voters thought the New Deal was minding the business it was meant to-theirs. They felt the new laws were helping them cope with the Depression. They reelected President Roosevelt by a big margin in 1936. After his victory, Roosevelt cooked up another batch of "alphabet soup." This period was called the Second New Deal. Its focus was on relief and reform.

In the early years of the Depression, millions of men with families were out of work. The first New Deal laws had been aimed at helping people feed their families. Keeping students in school had seemed a less urgent need. In his second term, Roosevelt established the National Youth Administration (NYA). This program employed high school and college students. NYA jobs enabled millions of needy students to finish school.

By this time, New Deal policies were easing the hard times of the Depression for most people. But business was still sluggish. This meant that in some areas, jobs and regular paychecks were still hard to come by. The Works Progress Administration was set up to meet this need.

The WPA attacked the problem on two fronts. First, laborers were put to work on public works projects. WPA workers built things like roads, hospitals, and power plants. But people who did other kinds of work needed jobs, too. Musicians, artists, writers, and actors were also without work. The WPA created Federal Project One to help skilled workers. FP1 was made up of four sections.

The Federal Art Project paid artists to make murals, posters, and sculptures for public buildings. These artists created many portraits of life of the era. FAP also set up community centers. People of all ages received art education at these outreach centers.

The Federal Writers' Project created jobs for writers. Works such as area guides and studies of ethnic groups came from this project. Perhaps the most valuable works were the stories of over two thousand black people who had been slaves. The interviews give a rare glimpse of slave life.

People involved in all phases of theater worked in the Federal Theater Project. Under FTP, companies staged new and classic plays all over America. For theater people, the project provided work. For poor and rural areas, it



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brought a cultural element that would have been lacking even without the Depression.

Musicians found work with the Federal Music Project. The FMP funded music events and education for those unable to pay. Orchestras toured different parts of the country. Composers could see their original works performed. FMP workers also gathered and archived American folk music. (See actual works of the FP1 projects at the Library of Congress website.)

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was the strongest supporter of Federal Project One. Mrs. Roosevelt used her influence with the president and others to push for the funding of the arts projects. She felt that bringing culture into the lives of people was nearly as important as helping with food and jobs. She saw the projects as a way to lighten the darkness of the Depression.

FP1 had many critics. Some thought that funding "extras" like art and writing was a waste of tax money. Some people even saw a political threat in the projects. Chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, Martin Dies, was a strident critic. Dies was convinced that a communist element operated within the arts projects.

The complaints finally resulted in cutbacks in Federal Project budgets. The Theater Project, Mrs. Roosevelt's favorite, was eliminated in 1939. The other projects continued to lose ground. In 1943, the WPA was cut completely. FP1 was ended.

But the arts projects left a remarkable legacy. The works themselves are a time capsule of the Depression Era. Besides that, the fields of art, literature, theater, and music were forever enriched by those who participated in Federal Project One.

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Questions

1. Some people criticized the New Deal. What were their concerns?

2. Explain why the New Deal was called "alphabet soup."

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- _____ 3. The National Youth Administration:
- A. organized classes for students who couldn't afford to attend school
 - B. ran camps to give needy kids fun experiences
 - C. gave jobs to high school and college students
 - D. provided scholarships for students to attend college
- _____ 4. Even though many New Deal programs focused on providing jobs, unemployment was still a problem in America. This was because:
- A. People didn't have cars or other means of getting to work.
 - B. Business still hadn't recovered from the effects of the Depression.
 - C. Many people just didn't want to work.
5. The WPA focused on two main areas. Explain them.

- _____ 6. Besides paying artists to produce murals, sculptures, and the like, the Federal Art Project also:
- A. created community centers where people could come for art education
 - B. paid artists to go back to school to learn more useful trades
 - C. gave laborers jobs building public works projects
 - D. funded touring theater companies

7. Describe the Federal Writers' Project.

8. Federal Project One had supporters and detractors. Name one of each and explain their points of view.
