

**TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES AND THE LOUISIANA DIGITAL LIBRARY****Louisiana Gumbo Lesson Resource**

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**A NEW DEAL FOR LOUISIANA: THE WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION**

<b>Subject</b>	Louisiana and American History
<b>Grade</b>	7-12
<b>Time</b>	Varies. This lesson contains a historical background and suggestions for further exploration of the LOUISiana Digital Library's Works Progress Administration

**Overview**

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a massive employment relief program launched in the spring of 1935 under the direction of Harry Hopkins. The Works Progress Administration's philosophy was to put the qualified unemployed back to work in jobs which would serve the public good and conserve the skills and self-esteem of workers throughout the U.S. The WPA eventually employed approximately one-third of the nation's 10,000,000 unemployed.

**Suggestion:** Refer to the lesson entitled Herbert Hoover's Unemployment Relief Agency: Relief for Louisiana. Hoover's Unemployment Relief Agency preceded Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal work projects. The documents examined in the Relief for Louisiana lesson will allow students to compare and contrast Hoover's Depression-era programs with Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration.

**Note:** The Works Progress Administration was instrumental in documenting and preserving documents and artifacts related to Louisiana's cultural and political history and heritage. This lesson integrates WPA artifacts from the Louisiana Collection of the State Library of Louisiana.

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**Content Standards:**

- **History: Time, Continuity, and Change**  
Students develop a sense of historical time and historical perspective as they study the history of their community, state, nation, and world.

**Benchmarks:**

- **H-1A-H3** interpreting and evaluating the historical evidence presented in primary and secondary sources;

**Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs):**

- **Historical Thinking Skills**  
**Grade 9-12**  
9. U.S. History: Evaluate and use multiple primary or secondary materials to interpret historical facts, ideas, or issues (H-1A-H3)

**Interdisciplinary Connections:**

**English/Language Arts : Standard 5** Students locate, select, and synthesize information from a variety of texts, media, references, and technological sources to acquire and communicate knowledge.

**Educational Technology Standards:**

- Use appropriate technology to locate, retrieve, organize, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information for problem solving and decision-making.

**Objectives:**

The student will

1. Select and use available/appropriate technology to access and analyze electronic primary artifacts stored in the LOUISiana Digital library database;
2. Compare and contrast two or more primary sources concerning Louisiana work projects for accuracy of historical information;
3. Prepare and interpret a chart that documents the progress of Louisiana-based work projects;
4. Use reading comprehension skills and available technology to locate, select, and synthesize information from primary and secondary sources to acquire and communicate knowledge about events, ideas, and issues related to the great Depression;
5. Demonstrate historical perspective by participating in a class discussion concerning the political, social, and economic context of Depression-era federal aid programs.

## Works Progress Administration

### Historical Background

Previous attempts to bring the Depression under control with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Public Works Administration (PWA), and the Civil Works Administration (CWA) targeted mainly unemployed blue-collar workers by providing jobs in construction-related industries. The needs of professional and white-collar workers were largely ignored. The Works Progress Administration, part of Roosevelt's Second New Deal, not only continued to supply jobs in construction, but also opened opportunities for unemployed professionals including teachers, artists, and musicians.

In Louisiana, the bulk of WPA spending went toward the construction and maintenance of the state's infrastructure, including street paving and bridge building. Smaller amounts funded the educational, recreational, and cultural programs of Federal Project Number One, or "Federal One," of the Works Progress Administration.

### Work Projects: Construction and Infrastructure

The WPA represented the largest program of its kind in American history. It put much-needed dollars into the hands of jobless millions and in the process contributed to the nation's infrastructure.

The 1935 publication, *Guide to Eligibility of WPA Projects*, identified 19 types of fundable work activities ranging from malaria control and construction of sewerage systems to recreational programs and street building. However, these jobs were viewed as temporary and were not intended to replace or compete with jobs in the private sector.

WPA compensation was based on a "security wage" which was an hourly amount greater than the typical relief payment but less than the wages offered by private employers. However, wages differed greatly from region to region and from state to state, and disparate wages was a constant source of dissatisfaction among workers. In 1937, a Tennessee construction worker averaged \$26 per month and WPA photographers, such as Dorothea Lange, earned approximately \$35 per month while musicians in New Orleans could make as much as \$96 per month.

As of 1940, the WPA had

- erected 4,383 new school buildings and made repairs and additions to over 30,000 others;
- built more than 130 hospitals and made improvements to another 1670;
- Laid nearly 9000 miles of new storm drains and sanitary sewer lines;
- planted 24 million trees;
- built or refurbished over 2500 sports stadiums around the country with a combined seating capacity of 6,000,000;
- paved or repaired 280,000 miles of roads and streets and constructed 29,000 bridges; and

Table 1  
WPA Expenditures

Year	Expenditure
1936	\$1,295,459,010
1937	\$1,879,493,595
1938	\$1,463,694,664
1939	\$2,125,009,386

Source: Office of Government Reports, Statistical Section, *Federal Loans and Expenditures*, Vol. II, Washington, D.C., 1940.

- built 150 new airfields and 280 miles of runway (Office of Government Reports, 1939).

To locate digitized primary artifacts related to the WPA work projects, please visit the [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](http://louisdl.louislibraries.org) in the LOUISiana Digital Library (<http://louisdl.louislibraries.org>). Related links include the [Southwestern Louisiana Institute Photographs, 1923-1940 Collection](#) and the [Louisiana Farm Security Administration Photographic Collection](#)

## Federal Project Number One

*New Deal cultural projects took responsibility for our cultural commonwealth and for preserving and promoting minority cultures. They took on the task of recording history -- including many parts otherwise deemed too painful or embarrassing to mention. More than that, they strove to promote cultural life where private action had failed or even done it positive harm.*

Don Adams and Arlene Goldbard

Federal Project Number One (Federal One) provided work relief for professionals and white-collar workers including the legions of artists, actors, writers, teachers, librarians, and musicians who lacked jobs. Federal One consisted of five major divisions: the Federal Art Project, the Federal Music Project, the Federal Theatre Project, the Federal Writers Project, and the Historical Records Survey.

- At its height in 1936, the **Federal Art Project (FAP)**, under the direction of Holger Cahill, employed over 5,000 visual artists and related professionals. The FAP murals division produced more than 2,500 murals in public buildings such as schools, libraries, post offices, and hospitals; the easel painting division produced nearly 108,000 paintings; and the sculpture division produced some 18,000 pieces. Other divisions included graphic arts, scenic design, poster design, and photography.

For a discussion of Louisiana's WPA artists, see [Art: an overview of art and crafts in Louisiana from the 1700s to the late 1930s](#) compiled by FWP authors in the 1930s. Related links include [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](#), the [Southwestern Louisiana Institute Photographs, 1923-1940 Collection](#), the [Louisiana Farm Security Administration Photographic Collection](#) from the Center for Louisiana Studies, the [Frances B. Johnston Photograph Collection](#), and the [Franck-Bertacci Photograph Collection](#) in the LOUISiana Digital Library.

- As a result of the Great Depression, almost two-thirds of all professional musicians in the U.S. were unemployed. **The Federal Music Project (FMP)**, directed by Nikolai Sokoloff, employed around 16,000 musicians at its peak and presented an estimated 5,000 performances before approximately three million people each week. FMP performing units formed symphonies, orchestras, concert bands, and ensembles that gave performances in schools, community centers, settlement houses, orphanages, prisons, hospitals, public parks, and rented halls in urban and rural areas. The FMP also collected and recorded folk music and provided classes in rural areas and urban neighborhoods.

Digitized images of related primary artifacts can be found in the [Louisiana State Museum Jazz Collection](#), the [Actors and Musicians Photograph Collection](#), and [Louis Hasselmanns' Musicians Photographs Collection](#) in the LOUISiana Digital Library.

- **The Federal Theatre Project (FTP)**, under the direction of Hallie Flanagan, employed approximately 13,000 theater workers at its peak. Federal Theatre units in 31 states presented more than 1,000 performances each month. Orson Welles, John Houseman, Burt Lancaster, Joseph Cotten, E.G. Marshall, and Sidney Lumet began their acting careers working with FTP projects.

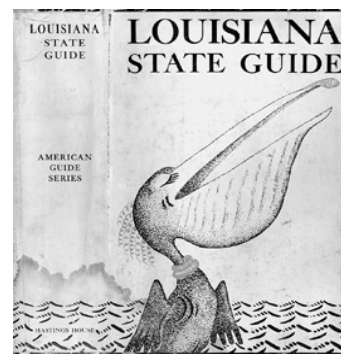
Digitized images of related primary artifacts can be found in [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](#), the [Strand Theatre Collection](#), and the [Actors and Musicians Photograph Collection](#) of the LOUISiana Digital Library.

- At its peak in 1936, the **Federal Writers Project (FWP)** employed over 7,000 writers in all 48 states. The Federal Writer's Project, directed by Henry Alsberg and John D. Newsome, is best-known for its American Guide Series, a comprehensive encyclopedia of Americana. The American Guide Series produced comprehensive guidebooks for every state that included detailed descriptions of towns and villages, waterways, and historic sites and extensive collections of oral history and folklore. The Federal Writer's Project also produced priceless archives like the Slave Narratives. Among many other participants in the FWP were Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Studs Terkel, Lyle Saxon, John Cheever, Saul Bellow, Margaret Walker, Arna Bontemps, and Zora Neale Hurston.

Digitized images of related primary artifacts can be found in the [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](#) of the LOUISiana Digital Library.

- The **Historical Records Survey**, under the leadership of Luther Evans, was the most financially efficient of all Federal One programs. HRS employed clerks, teachers, writers, librarians, and archivists to catalog, analyze, and compile inventories of state and county records. Other state materials included manuscript collections and church archives, bibliographies of American history and literature, a historical index of American musicians, and a collation of collections of presidential papers and messages.

Digitized images of related primary artifacts can be found in [The Louisiana Works Progress Administration \(WPA\) Collection](#) and the [Center for Louisiana Studies Archive Collection](#) of the LOUISiana Digital Library.



**LOUISIANA: A GUIDE TO THE STATE**/Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Louisiana.—New York: Hastings House, 1941.

## Federal One and Censorship

*I am asked whether a theater subsidized by the government can be kept free of censorship, and I say, yes, it is going to be kept free from censorship. What we want is a free, adult, uncensored theater.*

*Harry*

*Hopkins, 1936*

Despite Hopkins' pledge, the first act of censorship took place six months after this statement was made. At that time, the New York division of the Federal Theater Project's Living Newspaper project requested a recording of President Roosevelt's 1936 speech about Ethiopia. The intent of FTP writers

was to use the speech contents in their production of *Ethiopia*, a play which portrayed Haile Selassie and Mussolini in the wake of the Italian invasion. Alarmed over the possible direction of the play and its portrayal of Roosevelt's foreign policy, the White House banned the impersonation of any foreign ruler on all Federal Theatre stages.

Although no widespread federal bans developed as a result of this incident, censorship and criticism continued to plague the various Federal One agencies.

- In New York City, the WPA director had three panels of the four-panel mural at Brooklyn's Floyd Bennett Airport torn down and burned after he saw a figure which looked like Lenin and a plane with a red star that looked Soviet. The artist's source photos proved the Lenin look-alike was really an early parachutist and the plane a U.S. model.
- In Illinois, the WPA administrator closed the Chicago Negro Company's performance of *Hymn to the Rising Sun* because the play dealt with the use of chain-gang labor in the South.
- Late in July, 1938, Representative J. Parnell Thomas of the House Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities (HUAC) claimed that he had "startling evidence" that the Theatre and Writers Projects were "a hotbed of Communists."
- Publication of the Massachusetts edition of the American Guide Series was halted because it contained 31 lines on the Sacco-Vanzetti case in which two Italian immigrant anarchist activists had been executed over nationwide protests (Sacco and Vanzetti were officially vindicated by the governor of Massachusetts in 1977).
- The New Jersey state guidebook in the American Guide Series was criticized for its depiction of the 1935 shipbuilders' strike that hinted at controversy between capitalism and labor.

## WPA Decline

By the late 1930s, WPA agencies and programs were the most frequent targets of New Deal critics and provided a ready target for FDR's enemies. A principal criticism of the WPA was that the program wasted federal dollars on projects that were not always needed or wanted. Businessmen charged that the work programs competed unfairly with private industry, and organized labor complained that the WPA undercut prevailing wages. Conservatives disliked the themes of social protest and the economic inequity associated with many of the programs devised by the Federal Theatre and Federal Writers Projects. Disaffected WPA workers added fuel to the fire by testifying that WPA projects were tools of the Communist Party designed to breed class hatred in the United States. These attacks led to the ultimate censorship: the termination of the projects.

The Reorganization Act of 1939 renamed the agency the Work Projects Administration and made it a part of the Federal Works Agency. The same act succeeded in eliminating the Federal Theatre Project and curtailing the remaining Federal One projects. Construction once again became the major focus of all WPA programs.

With the onset of World War II, the WPA focused on issues related to national defense. As the war-time economy rebounded, the need for WPA job assistance declined. Finally, all of the WPA agencies were eliminated in July 1943.

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## Lesson Activity

### Preserving Louisiana History: The WPA Digital Collection

#### *Student Explorations*

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#### Investigation Guide Question:

**What interesting pieces of Louisiana history are preserved in the Works Progress Administration Digital Collection?**

- Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students per group.
- Explain that during the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration was responsible for documenting and preserving artifacts which record Louisiana's cultural and political heritage.
- Tell students that through this project, they will explore the WPA Collection of artifacts for interesting facts about any 5 of the following topics. Following the research phase of the lesson, students will present their findings to the class. The shared research will prepare each student to write a culminating essay which answers the Investigation Guide Question: *What interesting pieces of Louisiana history are preserved in the Works Progress Administration Digital Collection?*
- Ask each group to select 5 topics of interest (or assign topics).
- Ask each group to locate 2 facts of interest about each of the 5 topics they chose and record the information on the Preserving Louisiana History Research Form.
- If time allows, students may use digital artifacts and images to prepare a PowerPoint slideshow which illustrates their information.

#### Rubrics

- [Essay Rubric](#)
- [Multimedia Presentation Board](#)
- [Oral Presentation Rubric](#)
- [Observation Rubric](#)

#### TOPICS

*Select 5 topics of interest*

Native American lifestyles  
Acadian crafts  
African American families  
Ghosts of Louisiana  
Recipes  
Louisiana crops

Louisiana industries  
Louisiana homes  
Education  
Interesting duels  
Louisiana pirates

World War II military  
leaders  
Archaeology  
Louisiana art and artists  
Louisiana authors



Works Progress Administration  
**Preserving Louisiana History**  
Research Form

Group Members:

Date:

Topic	Fact 1	Fact 2