

Educators' Guide  
to  
*The Map and Guide to the Art and Public Works of the New Deal: Washington, D.C.*  
Created by the Living New Deal Project, [livingnewdeal.org](http://livingnewdeal.org)

### **Introduction**

This guide is a tool for teachers of history, geography, and social studies in Washington D.C. schools. Complimenting the printed map, it is intended to be a starting point for exploring the New Deal's relevance to the present day. The map offers students a concise view of over 500 New Deal sites throughout D.C. – hundreds of which are still in use today – including buildings, artworks, parks, wharves, roads, and bridges. It illustrates graphically how the New Deal transformed the nation's capital, as it did other American cities and the rest of the country, in the middle of the 20th Century.

The searchable [online map of New Deal sites](#) includes expanded descriptions of the D.C. sites, along with more than 17,000 sites all over the United States.

The New Deal was an amalgam of dozens of programs and agencies created by the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration and the Congress. The Living New Deal website concisely answers "[What was the New Deal?](#)". Find a [comprehensive list of programs](#), an [alphabetical list of New Deal programs](#), and a [New Deal Timeline with a chronology of programs](#). Find a collection of recommended reading lists on different aspects of the New Deal [here](#).

### **Rationale for Integrating the Washington, D.C. Map & Guide into US History Instruction**

The New Deal Washington map and guide works in three ways. Its dramatic visual impact is a means of gaining students' attention and stimulating their interest in looking more closely at the District of Columbia. Find a brief description of the New Deal in Washington, D.C. [here](#). The clear presentation through cartography and text in a handy pocket-size makes the content readily accessible. Finally, the document both illustrates the enormous impact of the New Deal era on the country and addresses a crucial question facing America today: "What can the government do to improve our cities, economy, and the lives of people?"

Investments by the federal government through programs collectively known as the New Deal improved and modernized public infrastructure nationwide; employed and trained millions of workers, including artists; and addressed the key challenges of the time. Those challenges included the economic collapse of the Great Depression, mass unemployment, impoverishment of working people, and the degraded condition of the nation's land, water, and forests. What is more, the New Deal's policies and investments lasted for decades, helping the country win World War II, become the world's most prosperous nation after the war, and create the Great American Middle Class of the 20th century – things now very much in jeopardy.

The Living New Deal is well aware of the dark side of America's racial order – slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, xenophobia and more – and the long struggles to make the nation live up to its proclaimed ideals of liberty and justice for all. The New Deal is embedded in this history, coming in the 1930s when Jim Crow and immigrant exclusion were at their height. Nevertheless, our view is that the Roosevelt Administration aided African Americans and other racialized minorities in significant ways and, despite certain glaring failures, constituted an important step forward in the long struggle for Civil Rights and social justice. Find a discussion of The New Deal and Race [here](#).

### **Some Suggested Learning Objectives:**

- To learn about a major turning point in American history and its transformational role on American life and government.
- To learn about the government's role in public investment and how long-term spending can benefit people and places over many years.
- To learn about the relationship between federal, state, and local governments in our federal system, as well as the special status of the District of Columbia.
- To understand the essential role of public works (infrastructure) of all kinds in the functioning of this (and every) U.S. city.
- To read and navigate cartographic representations of the city and its history, i.e. historic maps and other visual documents.
- To help students develop independent research skills by using the map to guide their own site and city exploration.
- To help students learn to follow up field work with written, photographic, audio and video observations of New Deal sites and their place in the urban fabric.
- To contribute to The Living New Deal's national database of New Deal sites by using the LND iPhone app to submit personal observations, photographs, and videos.

### **Related Skills**

- Seeing the built environment or urban landscape more clearly and its relationship to daily life of the people
- Encouraging students to think critically about history: What gets remembered and what is forgotten? How have people been represented in monuments and artworks?
- Learning to see beyond the present to understand events, people, and experiences in the nation's past.
- Learning to temper judgement of people and actions in the past when practices and ideas were very different.
- Connecting events, policies, and investments in the past to present day places, infrastructure, and daily life in the city

### **Suggested Activities for Students**

#### **Individual or Group Project Suggestions:**

- Choose a New Deal site near home or school, seek it out, describe it, record personal reactions to it, and see how other people interact with it.
- Use the [Living New Deal online map](#) and other online resources to discover historical facts about a site and why it is still in place or how it has been significantly altered and readapted.
- Visit New Deal sites and use the [Living New Deal iPhone app](#) to record observations in pictures and comments.
- [Submit findings](#) to be added to the LND database and map and see your personal research contribute to a collective project of discovery.
- Seek out New Deal artwork sites and record personal reactions. Then reflect on how the values and biases of the era affected the artists' choices of themes and portrayals.

- Select a group of sites of one kind (for example, Parks & Recreation, Artworks, or Roads & Bridges), observe how the sites are distributed around the city, and think about why they were located where they were and who they served (and who they didn't).

Group Project Suggestions:

“Proposal for a New Public Works Project in Washington D.C.”

1. You have just learned that there are funds for new public works project designed by youth. What new project would you and a partner/small group create if you were to receive these funds from the government? Using the Living New Deal map, plan and go on a field trip in which you visit two or three public works in your city.
2. Think about what type of project YOU would create if you received funds to do this. Would your project have to do with the arts, a monument to a person, infrastructure (for example a bridge), or something else?
3. Write a proposal for a new public works project in Washington D.C. Your proposal should include the following items:
  - i. Rationale
  - ii. Historical background
  - iii. An illustration/drawing of the proposed project
  - iv. Project timeline (include design time, construction/creation, promotional events)
  - v. Personnel (e.g., artist, architect, engineers, DJ for the unveiling, etc.)
  - vi. Budget
4. Present your project to the class, the school, maybe even the school board or city council.

“Living New Deal Mural Project“

1. Use the Living New Deal map of Washington D.C. to begin research on murals created during the New Deal in Washington D.C. Do background research on the underlying social, economic, or cultural issues portrayed in the murals. Remember to keep in mind the period of history in which the New Deal artists were painting, and how life in American has changed (or not) since then. In other words, assume a historical perspective as well as a contemporary perspective. View the recorded Living New Deal webinar on muralist painters’ techniques, styles, and influences ([Mexican muralists, socialist art](#)). You might also invite an artist or college art student to come into talk to the class about muralists of the New Deal Period. Visit websites such as the [National Archives](#).
2. Plan and go on a class field trip to visit one of the murals created during the New Deal in Washington D.C. As an alternative to a class field trip, plan and take a field trip on your own.
3. Write-up and present your background research, which should be historically contextualized. Talk about the issues of that period represented in the mural, along with the artist’s perspectives. You can also bring your own contemporary perspectives to bear upon the way the artist portrays the issues in question. For example, who is represented and who is not? Are there racist, sexist, classist positions portrayed or critiqued in the mural?
4. Back at school, in pairs or groups, create a sketch for a new art mural that represents an important theme found in New Deal murals that is still relevant today: for example, food insecurity and the creation of urban gardens, or homelessness and the building of affordable housing. Present your group’s mural sketch to the class along with your background research and an explanation of the themes represented in your proposed mural.

5. Find out about new public murals around the city at the [MuralsDC website](#). Invite a muralist to help your class create a public mural. Find out what permits would be required and how you would go about getting a grant to pay to create the mural.

*Suggested Prompts for Narrative and Personal Writing:*

- What's special about living in the nation's capital city?
- How much does your neighborhood define who you are?
- How well do you know your way around your city?
- What did you learn about the city's history from using the map?
- Why do many people consider the New Deal a turning point in US history?
- Do/did you have any relatives who were touched by the New Deal?
- How much do you know about the rest of the City?
- What is your favorite street or place in Washington D.C.?
- What buildings do you love? What buildings do you hate?
- What famous landmarks have you visited?
- How has travel around the City affected you?
- What event in the past do you wish you could have witnessed?
- What era do you wish you had lived in?

**Recommended Background Reading**

Recommended books about the New Deal, organized by topic, are collected in the [New Deal Reading List](#).

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