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"The New Deal Network"

<http://newdeal.feri.org/>

by

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"The New Deal Network" is a sweeping web site devoted to all the products of American President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies. When a website is sponsored by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute and the Institute for Learning Technologies at Teachers' College of Columbia University, and funded by National Endowment for the Humanities and IBM, one expects big things. Unfortunately, the New Deal Network does not deliver, providing spotty hit-and-miss use of its amazing resources and Internet medium.

While the main page itself is clear and easy to navigate due to intelligent use of graphics, when one ventures further it is easy to get lost or sidetracked, with the uneasy feeling that you have accidentally jumped to another site. This seems to be a trend among the available hyertext resources on the Federal Writers' Project (the Library of Congress site excepted). Perhaps this is because there is so much available; so much uncatalogued and untapped material that it's tempting to put as much up as fast as possible, leading to a disconcerting crazy quilt of pages. "The New Deal Network" simply provides too much information. While its list of links is comprehensive and exhaustive, it is so overly long as to become useless. The page would be better served with a separate index page leading to the various subjects, rather than one long continuous list of links that seems to go on forever.

Much of the information provided on "The New Deal Network" is not really suitable for scholarly work at the university level. Seemingly geared toward the elementary or middle school instructor, the site is hampered by educational exercises that seem rather obvious and unnecessary. What's missing are more interactive lesson plans for school age children, and more involved lesson ideas for university level. A forum for instructors who have taken the step and are using the Federal Writers and other WPA material would be much more valuable than the ideas provided. Real life mistakes made and corrected are more useful than impersonal lesson plans.

On the bright side, Mark Krasovic's essay on the Federal Writer's Ex-Slave interviews, part of the "Been Here So Long" selection from the *WPA American Slave Narratives*, is a good basic introduction to the topic but at times leans heavily upon William Stott's 1986 book, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (left uncredited in the essay). However, Krasovic does the topic credit with his brief introduction by acknowledging the complexity involved in the superficially simple documents.

While the information provided and the mistakes made might be acceptable from a smaller, less well funded and awarded website, coming from the New Deal Network it is inexcusable and a shame. The medium and the information have huge potential that, unfortunately, is better tapped in other, smaller sites.