

Chapter 1 : Federal Theatre Project Collection: About the WPA Federal Theatre Project

The Federal Theatre Project (FTP;) was a New Deal program to fund theatre and other live artistic performances and entertainment programs in the United States during the Great Depression. It was one of five Federal Project Number One projects sponsored by the Works Progress Administration. It was created not as a cultural activity but as a relief measure to employ artists, writers, directors and theater workers.

She attended Grinnell College where she majored in Philosophy and German, and was an active member in the dramatic club. During her time at Grinnell she met husband, Murray Flanagan, also a member of the Grinnell dramatic college. After college, the two exchanged vows, and had two sons, Jack and Frederick Flanagan. Murray was diagnosed with tuberculosis; the disease took his life in Soon after, the eldest son, Jack, died of spinal meningitis in This class, one of the first of its kind at an American university, taught playwriting. While at Radcliffe and later at Vassar College , Flanagan began developing her own ideas for experimental theatre. Vassar College[edit] When Flanagan came to Vassar, there was no theater and all drama courses were taught in the English department. In , Flanagan became the first woman awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to study theatre around Europe for 14 months. Flanagan especially shared a connection with the Russian theater, and later wrote a book, *Shifting Scenes of the Modern European Theater* , based on her travels. After returning to Vassar, she began to institute many of her newly developed ideas with the Vassar Experimental Theatre, which she created. Roosevelt established the WPA to provide jobs for many of the unemployed. Among the many branches of this program was the Federal Theatre Project, which aimed to employ the jobless entertainers across America. The project supported struggling artists with subsidized funds, and spread well-crafted, affordable theatre across the nation. Though the Project enabled the creation of a number of great works, some took issue with the apparent political agendas being delivered by the plays. Concerns over works with messages deemed to be communistic and socialistic plagued Flanagan and the Theatre Project. On these qualms, Flanagan states, "The basis of the choice of plays is that we have always believed in the Federal Theatre Project that any theater supported by the Federal funds should do no plays of a subversive, or cheap, or shoddy, or vulgar, or outworn, or imitative nature, but only such plays as the Government could stand behind in a program which is national in scope and regional in emphasis and democratic in American attitude. In New York City alone, the Federal Theatre Project regularly played to weekly audiences of , many of whom had never seen live theater before. Since the plays were federally funded, the Project could afford to sell tickets at drastically reduced prices, making the productions accessible and inclusive to a wider audience. In , Flanagan was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee under suspicion of supporting a socialist agenda and subverting American values through her work at the Federal Theatre Project. Smith College[edit] In , Flanagan accepted a post as head of the theatre department at Smith College and remained there until her retirement. In , she married Philip Davis, a professor of Greek at Vassar. She is also a minor character in the novel *The Group* , by Vassar grad Mary McCarthy , being mentioned in the first chapter and appearing briefly in the last chapter. Flanagan went on leave from Smith in and officially retired to Poughkeepsie in She was recognized many times for her contributions to modern theater, including an honorary degree from Williams College in and the first National Theater Conference Citation award in Flanagan spent the last few years of her life in nursing homes and died on July 23, in Old Tappan, NJ.

Chapter 2 : Federal Theatre Project Collection: Home Page

*The Federal Theatre Project also had active Children's Theatre units; they were not immune to criticism, either. One of the most infamous children's plays was *Revolt of the Beavers*-- criticized for its socialistic viewpoint (click the image or title above to see more information).*

The host, Virgil Thomson, was a strikingly original composer, famous for *Four Saints in Three Acts*, a surrealist operatic collaboration with writer Gertrude Stein. In the latter production, Welles directed and played the title role too. Finally, there was Hallie Flanagan. This year-old Iowan headed one of the more fascinating and controversial undertakings ever established by the United States government. By the time of the dinner party, the Great Depression had gripped the United States for some seven years. Following his inauguration in 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had attempted to remedy the situation with a blizzard of agencies, reforms, and legislation. Its mission was to provide jobs for the unemployed by building highways, bridges, and public buildings; restoring forests; clearing slums; and providing rural electricity. The WPA also created programs that commissioned public murals, brought opera to isolated towns, and produced state and regional travel guides. They wanted to create a national network of community theaters that would bring productions to communities around the country. By the middle of March 1935, the FTP had 11, workers and 22 producing centers reaching a weekly audience of about 1,000,000. Where Flanagan saw information, however, others saw propaganda. There was nothing pink about the production of *T. Even Chalk Dust*, another muckraking production about abuses in public schools, appeared free of the taint of propaganda. Which brings us back to that dinner party. Born in Philadelphia in 1904, Blitzstein had been a child prodigy and a student of renowned composers Arnold Schoenberg and Nadia Boulanger. Early in his career, Blitzstein produced thorny, dissonant works that he freely admitted were only for cognoscenti. As his small but select audience raptly listened, Blitzstein played the piano and sang every part in the score. His work had a familiar Depression-era theme. The gallant worker was *Larry Foreman*, the factory owner was *Mister Mister*, the newspaperman was *Editor Daily*, and so on. *Mister Mister*, the mighty potentate of *Steeltown*, had corrupted the Church, the Press, the Arts, and the Universities. The group at the dinner party was electrified. Houseman and Welles were the obvious people to do it. Although their partnership would end amid mutual recriminations after Welles moved to Hollywood to direct films, the two made a good theatrical team. But the results spoke for themselves. Besides the acclaimed productions of *Macbeth* and *Dr. Strangelove*. At first he preferred long lunches to rehearsing. He might dismiss the cast at four the next morning, but when we would return at noon, we would find Orson sleeping in a theatre seat. As unions revived and expanded, strikes were frequent, and often violent. In autoworkers, truckers, and longshoremen had weathered police and vigilantes to gain valuable concessions. The Committee for Industrial Organization CIO had been formed in 1935, as had the United Auto Workers; together they coordinated a momentous and successful six-week sit-down strike against General Motors in early 1936. The political situation was tense. On June 12, four days before the first preview and with 14, tickets already sold, Flanagan received a communication from Washington. Welles would not accept it. For us, they never reopened. To make matters worse, the Actors Equity union prohibited its members from defying the WPA by performing in the show. Welles dispatched an assistant to begin a hectic search for a piano, while he and Houseman tried to find another theater. The assistant found a piano and a truck to haul it but no one knew where to bring it. The new venue was still in doubt when the audience began arriving at the theater around 7: The truck was dispatched northward, and the crew went outside to announce that the show or some version of it would go on after all, just in a different location. Then commenced one of the most celebrated episodes in Broadway history as the audience, cast, and crew rambled uptown by public transportation, taxi, and on foot, offering free seats in the larger new venue to bystanders who joined the throng. By the time everyone arrived at Seventh Avenue and 59th Street, the mood in the packed theater was euphoric. Blitzstein set to work removing the front of the piano so it would better project in the large theater, and lighting director Abe Feder hurriedly set up a spotlight. And there was I, alone on a bare stage, perched before the naked piano in my shirt sleeves, it being a hot night; myself, produced by John Houseman, directed

by Orson Welles, lit by Abe Feder, and conducted by Lehman Engel, who had rushed home, got his winter overcoat, and returned to smuggle my orchestra score out of one theater and into another. The voice of Olive Stanton, cast as the Moll, soared out from the audience. The cast had reasoned that Actors Equity had barred them from performing on stage. Nothing prevented them from performing from the seats! There was instead a roomful of men and women as eager in the play as any actor. As singers rose in one part and another of the auditorium, the faces of these men and women made new and changing circles around them. It then went on tour and returned to Broadway for another successful run in , when it became the first original-cast musical in Broadway history to be recorded virtually in its entirety. Out-of-work vaudevillians had staged variety shows, circuses had appeared in armories, and marionette plays had delighted children and adults. In fact, the FTP was too good. It so successfully competed with the commercial theater that many politicians questioned why the government was subsidizing something that could clearly stand on its own. Nevertheless, the FTP failed to become the national theater that Flanagan wanted. In 29 states the FTP had no sponsors or projects, and in most of the others its presence was small. The president had attempted but failed to purge conservative Democrats from the party, and Republicans had made considerable gains in the Congressional elections. One witness summed it up this way: Nearly everything it had produced was innocuous, but a few excessive and headstrong productions made the headlines. Flanagan and the other directors of the FTP probably should have known better than to try so eagerly to fashion their undertaking into a vehicle for social change. Years later John Houseman remembered the experience fondly. Added to the satisfaction of accomplishing an urgent and essential social task in a time of national crisis, we enjoyed the excitement that is generated on those rare and blessed occasions when the theatre is suddenly swept into the historical mainstream of its time. For more great articles, subscribe to American History magazine today!

Chapter 3 : Centerstage Theatre Arts Conservatory

Federal Theatre Project National Play Policy Board. The National Play Policy Board was established early in January Its aim was to meet the need for central control of Federal Theatre play contracts and royalties and also pool the knowledge and skill of Project directors throughout the country.

This page last modified: Some of the links will take you to sites made specifically for this page; you may use the link at the bottom of those pages to return here Once the government took on the task of putting people to work producing theatre, it was able, in part, to subsume the movement. Most of its famous productions, although not all of them, came out of New York City: The Federal Theatre Project was the only fully government-sponsored theatre ever in the United States. **BACKGROUND** The decade of the s was an era of apparently prosperous but in fact endangered economy; weaknesses in the agricultural system and the dependence on an industrial urban machine lead to the stock-market crash and Great Depression in October By winter , 4 million were unemployed; by March , 8 million. Herbert Hoover did apparently little, thinking prosperity was just around the corner. By , when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected, the national income was half that of ; there were 12 million unemployed one of four. Within two weeks of his inauguration, in , FDR reopened three-fourths of the Federal Reserve Banks and continued to try to fix the economy. For instance, the C. By the economy had recovered a bit, but reforms quickened the recovery even more. One of those reforms was the W. There were four arts projects formed for white-collar workers: Art , Music, Writers , and Theatre. Most blame fell on the Federal Theatre Project [this link takes you to the American Memory, New Deal Collection page at the Library of Congress]--formed August 27, , with its first production in , it remained in existence until It employed 10, people per year on average; up to 12, people at its highest. Lorraine Brown of George Mason University, one of the two people responsible for discovering the FTP files in an airplane hanger in Baltimore gave productions of at least major works and of new plays 29 new musicals to an audience estimated at 25 million people in 40 states. You can see a number of photos of FTP productions by going here. He turned to Hallie Flanagan [this link takes you to the Library of Congress site] , who was a teacher and director at Grinnell College in Iowa. She had been a student in George P. The Communist revolution had occurred in Russia in and many Europeans came to the U. The problems began to appear almost immediately: Most Living Newspapers used a common man as their unifying character, whose curiosity about the current problem has been aroused. The character is then led through a background of the problem, which clarifies the issue for the audience. The show depicted Haile Salassie, leader of Ethiopia. Washington immediately ordered that no current ministers or heads of state could be represented in the Federal Theatre Project plays, a policy that was eventually modified to allow for actual quotes, but still no depictions of real heads of state were allowed. Playwright Elmer Rice , who had taken the position as director of the New York City project, resigned over what he thought was censorship. The incident was highly publicized Flanagan said later that the publicity may have kept the FTP as free from censorship as it was. Other living newspapers followed, however, and became what some have called one of two unique American contributions to world theatre the other being the musical:

Chapter 4 : Federal Theatre Project: U.S. Government-Sponsored Show Business | HistoryNet

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The Federal Theatre Project was the largest and most ambitious effort mounted by the Federal Government to organize and produce theater events. It was an effort of the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to provide work for unemployed professionals in the theater during the Great Depression which followed the stock market crash of October 1929. It functioned from 1935 to 1939 when its funding was terminated. In that brief period, it was responsible for some of the most innovative staging of its time. See *Manual for Federal Theatre Projects* While the primary aim of the FTP was the reemployment of theater workers on public relief rolls, including actors, directors, playwrights, designers, vaudeville artists, and stage technicians, it was also hoped that the project would result in the establishment of theater so vital to community life that it would continue to function after the FTP program was completed. The first official announcement of what was to become the Federal Theatre Project came on August 2, 1935, when the directors of the original four arts-related projects, collectively known as Federal Project Number One, were made known. Federal One, as it came to be called, included projects for drama, music, art, and writing. On that date presidential allocation of funds for Federal One was made. FTP came to an end on June 30, 1939, when its funding was terminated. In the course of its existence, the FTP was responsible for hundreds of stage productions, both of classics and new plays written for the FTP, mounted in cities across the nation. The FTP is the only instance in which the Federal government was directly responsible for the production and administration of stage work on a large scale. Touring It was not feasible to operate Federal Theatre Project companies in towns where only a few theater professionals were on relief rolls. However, in order to serve a wide geographic area, FTP projects toured in rural areas. For example, the Illinois circuit, with companies from Chicago and Peoria, gave performances in Wisconsin and Illinois. Another Midwest circuit, operating out of Detroit, gave performances in other areas of the state of Michigan. One of the components of the FTP was the National Service Bureau which gave script and technical service, and, when possible, lent equipment and personnel to community and educational groups in every state in the union. Federal Theatre Project companies covered a number of sections of the country where dramatic productions were infrequently seen. It always was a unit of the Works Progress Administration, which was administered overall by Harry Hopkins. Hopkins had five assistant administrators. At the outset, the FTP director reported through one of these assistants, Mr. Jacob Baker; later through Mrs. Ellen Woodward who supervised all professional projects, including the four arts projects. The National Director was assisted by a Deputy National Director in charge of administration and procedures, and by an Associate Director in charge of all national services such as the handling of royalties, the loan of equipment and personnel, and the reading and reporting on plays. Earlier, there were five assistant directors. See *The Work Program* These ten people made up the Federal Theatre Policy Board, which met every four months, deciding on policies and plays for the next four months. At the meetings, the regional directors presented reports from their state and local directors, allowing a pooling of local, state, and regional ideas. Decisions about the allocation of funds, opening and closing of projects, and employment and dismissal of personnel in key positions, was vested in the National Director and Deputy Director. More than nine out of every ten of these workers came from the relief rolls. Ninety percent of the FTP appropriation had to be spent on wages. About fifty per cent of FTP personnel were actors. Others were writers, designers, theater musicians, dancers, stage hands, box office staff, ushers, maintenance workers, and the accounting and secretarial force necessary to carry out any enterprise operated under procedures required by the Government of the United States. These workers were employed in theater companies operating in at least forty cities in twenty-two states. Stage Production Stage productions fell into the following categories, some of which overlapped: Various kinds of units produced under FTP. With this commitment of funding, representatives of the Federal Theatre director throughout the country, set up classification boards, auditioned theatre personnel and started theater groups, in

cooperation with local Works Progress Administration offices and with the United States Employment Service. In many of these states, there were a number of projects. In order to provide professional and technical direction for a nationwide program under the Federal Theatre Project, the United States was divided into several theater regions. A Regional Director of the Federal Theatre Project was appointed for each of these regions to act as the representative, in that region, for the Federal Director of Theatre Projects in Washington. The Regional Director, with the cooperation of existing Works Progress Administration officials in his region, directed the functions of the FTP, and approved all appointments to superintendence positions in the theater projects in his region. The theater regions were as follows: New Jersey - Pennsylvania. Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia. North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia. Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin. Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas Northwest Region: Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming. Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland. The initial activities of a developing drama project took place in December. The Roosevelt administration requested Mrs. Dwight Davis, Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the New York State Civil Works Administration, to develop a project that would create jobs for unemployed professionals, especially women. Emily Holt, assistant counsel of Actors Equity Association, and Dorothy Bryant, executive secretary of the Chorus Equity Association, formulated a concurrent and separate plan for unemployed professional actors in conjunction with Paul N. Turner, attorney for Equity. Their idea was to engage salaried casts to present plays of recognized merit at available places. The suggestion was favorably received, and an experimental plan worked out, in conjunction with Mrs. Six performances were to be given each week. As the appropriation was made exclusively for services, a fund was raised by Katharine Cornell, Peggy Wood and Katherine Hepburn to defray the expenses of costumes, properties and accessories. It was announced that the actors were to be engaged for twelve plays to be presented over a period of eight weeks. More than 1, actors were on hand, many of whose faces were familiar to New York City theatergoers and some of whose names had appeared in lights on Broadway. Strict anonymity was observed in all instances so far as the names of actors were concerned. Before the original two-month period expired, the experiment had become a definite success, not only as the answer to the need of actors, but as a means of providing free entertainment for thousands of persons. Additional appropriations were forthcoming, additional actors were engaged and additional plays were staged. At first, a cast of actors would play for eight weeks, then be succeeded by a new cast, making it possible to employ a larger number of actors. Later, when the project had been put on a more substantial basis, this policy was abrogated and the time limit for the actor was eliminated. Casts were signed through the Actors Equity Association where the offices of the project were first located. Out of the original repertoire of twelve plays, five were presented on the evening of January 30, , just two weeks after the first actors were signed and went into rehearsal. As soon as the project had been more firmly, if not permanently, established, it expanded rapidly by means of the eight-week rotation system. By October 1, , about 1, actors had been given work. As the number of plays in the repertoire increased, so did the number of working actors. By the beginning of , the Drama Department had become a going concern. A repertoire of forty plays, which had either been produced or were in preparation, had been assembled. Departments that had been established included the following:

Chapter 5 : The Federal Theatre Project

Unfortunately this book is not Federal theatre plays. 1. Prologue to glory, by E. P. Conkle. 2. One-third of a nation, edited by Arthur Arent.

Background[edit] Philip W. Greek theatre on Delos [1]: The Federal Theatre Project was a new approach to unemployment in the theatre profession. The problems of the theatre preceded the financial collapse of By that time it was already threatened with extinction due to the growing popularity of films and radio, but the commercial theatre was reluctant to adapt its practices. Sound motion pictures displaced 30, musicians. Unemployed directors, actors, designers, musicians and stagecrew took any kind of work they were able to find, whatever it paid, and charity was often their only recourse. The primary aim of the Federal Theatre Project is the reemployment of theatre workers now on public relief rolls: The far reaching purpose is the establishment of theatres so vital to community life that they will continue to function after the program of this Federal Project is completed. At its conclusion, 65 percent of its productions were still presented free of charge. Therefore, when Federal Theatre was criticized for spending money, it was criticized for doing what it was set up to do. Only one event was presented in Arkansas. Units created in Minnesota, Missouri and Wisconsin were closed in ; projects in Indiana, Nebraska, Rhode Island and Texas were discontinued in ; and the Iowa project was closed in On June 30, , the Federal Theatre Project ended when its funding was canceled, largely due to strong Congressional objections to the overtly left-wing political tones of less than 10 percent of the Federal Theatre Project productions. Living Newspaper Living Newspapers were plays written by teams of researchers-turned-playwrights. These men and women clipped articles from newspapers about current events, often hot button issues like farm policy, syphilis testing, the Tennessee Valley Authority , and housing inequity. These newspaper clippings were adapted into plays intended to inform audiences, often with progressive or left-wing themes. Triple-A Plowed Under, for instance, attacked the U. Supreme Court for killing an aid agency for farmers. These politically themed plays quickly drew criticism from members of Congress. Although the undisguised political invective in the Living Newspapers sparked controversy, they also proved popular with audiences. New productions[edit] Numbers following the city of origin indicate the number of additional cities where the play was presented.

Chapter 6 : Federal Theatre Project - WikiVisually

Congress created the Federal Theatre Project in to provide work for theater professionals during the Great Depression. The Project was funded under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and directed on the national level by Vassar College drama professor Hallie Flanagan ().

Tweet Congress created the Federal Theatre Project in to provide work for theater professionals during the Great Depression. Seattle initially sponsored three Units: The United States Congress abruptly disbanded the Federal Theatre Project on June 30, , amid cries of censorship from performers and accusations of communist infiltration from both within and without the organization. Hood as Washington State Supervisor. National Director Hallie Flanagan envisioned the FTP not only as work-aid to technicians and performers, but also as an opportunity to seed the nation with a vast network of theaters and to expose many Americans to live theater for the first time. Performances were free, or nearly so. Seattle, along with other major cities, sponsored racially segregated African American troops known as Negro Units. Productions were not confined to urban centers but opened in numerous towns, sometimes simultaneously. They were produced locally and employed local actors, directors, and technicians. In order for a city to host a Federal Theatre Project unit, a sponsor had to volunteer to organize and oversee that unit. In many cities, existing theaters served as sponsors. In order to qualify for Federal Theatre Project employment, a person had to show previous employment in the theatrical field and be on relief out of work and receiving government assistance. A 10 percent leeway to this policy permitted units to be professionally directed and supervised, and it was thus that the Jameses and Glenn Hughes were able to serve as organizers for Washington state. Directors found that administering a project on the government dole meant cooperating with the state WPA offices and coping with the omnipresent government red tape. All Theatre Project paperwork had to be filed in triplicate. In this age before the Xerox machine, documents were typed on a typewriter. To make copies additional sheets separated by carbon paper were inserted behind the sheet being typed on. One copy of every document went to the national office in Washington, D. All project proposals for any production of any kind had to be submitted in sextuplicate. Carved by skilled woodcarvers, they were accurately scaled models of the Theater at Delphi, the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, a Japanese Noh theater, a Japanese Kabuki theater, and a Roman Lyric theater, among others. As the models were nearing completion there was talk of shipping them to Washington D. Hughes had intended them to remain at the University of Washington and responded angrily, stating that they were not built in such a way that they could be shipped without damage. The models remain at the University of Washington. They were refurbished in the early s under the direction of UW Drama professor Jack Wolcott, and were on display in the lobby of Meany Hall for a number of years thereafter. They are currently in a University of Washington storage facility. This was followed by *Stevedore*, a Marxist-themed piece of social realism concerning a black union organizer unjustly accused of raping a white woman. The cast was interracial. Audiences responded strongly, even spontaneously rising up and surging onstage to join the cast for the climactic finale at one of the performances. In June , Burton and Florence James resigned from the Federal Theatre Project in protest over the outcry in the press concerning their production of *Power*. *Power* was a Living Newspaper advocating public ownership of utilities, a controversial idea at that time. The show sold out to huge audiences, but both Seattle newspapers denounced it. It marked a change from vibrant social realism to safer, less volatile subject matter. In the location is an underpass of I The Civilian Conservation Corps comprised men in their late teens, under the supervision of the U. Touring male actors could bunk at the CCC camps, but the women in the company had to be housed with various families, sometimes at an inconvenient distance from their colleagues, since CCC camps were in rural areas. Despite the logistical headaches, the tours boosted CCC camp morale and furthered the goal of exposing a wide audience to live theater. She also felt that Glenn Hughes, whose association with the Project had been strongest in its initial stages, was too preoccupied with his duties at the University of Washington to focus on the Federal Theatre Project. One vaudevillian she rehabilitated had been a skilled roper. Children came, literally, by the truckload. In Seattle, as elsewhere, the production was customized to be site-specific. Wary of the vitriol evoked by

Power, however, director Esther Porter Lane treaded cautiously. The show ended with an onstage conflagration of the towering tenement set. Spirochete *Treponema pallidum* is the name of the corkscrew-shaped bacteria that causes the sexually transmitted disease syphilis. At the time syphilis was incurable. The disease was so greatly feared and taboo-laden that many audience members had never heard the word "syphilis" spoken in public. Texas conservative Democrat Martin Dies spearheaded the committee. Federal Theatre Project productions were branded as propaganda for Communism. The public never saw this play: On June 30, 1952, all Federal Theatre Project workers nationwide were issued pink slips. The Project was officially and abruptly disbanded. In Washington state, as elsewhere, actors, technicians, directors, designers, costumers, ticket sellers, and vaudevillians all melted back into the fabric of society, each seeking a living without federal assistance. When the Federal Theatre Project closed, 8,000 people across the country lost their paycheck, 87 of them in the state of Washington. Theater professionals from around the country protested the demise of the Federal Theatre Project. Despite the furor over Communist infiltration, in the end it was not anticommunism that felled the Project, but the view in Congress that the average American saw no value in spending tax dollars to aid performers and encourage the arts. Hallie Flanagan, *Arena New York: Plays, Relief, and Politics* New York: Octagon Books, 1952; *Free, Adult, Uncensored*: Greenwood Press, 1971; [http: The Revival of a Black Drama](http://www.washington.edu/blackdrama) University of Washington Ph.

Chapter 7 : Hallie Flanagan - Wikipedia

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Federal Theater Project Challenging theatre traditions in several ways, the Federal Theatre Project was particularly bold in its plan to make drama available to the masses for the first time. The Federal Theater Project was designed to provide employment opportunities for unemployed artists. The project opened August 27, , and ran until June 30, During these four years, the government subsidized professional theater activities throughout the United States. At its peak, the project employed 10, people in forty states. For White artists, the Federal Theater Project was a temporary employment program to cover them when there was no commercial work. For African Americans, it was a first opportunity to actively participate in theater that was not about stereotypes, and, to explore roles as writers, producers, designers, and directors of American theater. The project effectively educated unskilled people who were newly entering the field of theater. Her background was in Hallie Flanagan social services and she wanted to develop theater and arts projects that were conscious of changes that needed to be made in the social order. She wanted to develop a theater that was regional and that reflected the diversity of America. The scope of the Federal Theater Project was great. Plays fell into the categories of new plays, classical plays, play formerly produced on Broadway, modern foreign plays, stock plays, revues and musical comedies, vaudeville, dance productions, Early Americana, American pageants, puppet and marionette plays. Each of these types of plays were produced at regional centers throughout the country. They also mounted African American productions of plays written by White playwrights. An example is the. She was committed to encouraging writing and producing by local talented youth. She also encouraged African Americans to perform whenever possible in current Broadway productions like *Androcles and the Lion*. When organizers of the Federal Theater Project met with Rose McClendon, it was decided that a White director should be placed in charge of the New York Negro unit to give it credibility. Rose McClendon was credited with calling for this arrangement. Their most successful commercial production was *Voodoo Macbeth*. During the time of the Federal Theater Project there was philosophical discussion about what Negroes should write and who should write for them. Some maintained "authentic black art required separate institutions. There ought to be a Negro play written by a Negro that no white could ever have conceived or executed. Quoted in Taylor, Zanche. As we shall see later in the semester, this debate continues today. There were five general types of theater that were developed and produced within the Negro Units 1 Popular commercial plays. These were plays developed for commercial theaters and general audiences. The two most successful African American plays of this type were *Swing Mikado*, a musical about the jazz music scene that was produced in Chicago and the previously mentioned *Voodoo Macbeth*. African drummers and scenic effects were used to create an atmosphere of exotic savagery. *Swing Makado* 2 Folk Dramas. These were plays about African American folk life and customs. These were dramas that addressed social issues with dramatic characters and circumstances. One of the plays that we will be reading for class, *Big White Fog* is an example of this type of play. *Big White Fog* is unusual for its time period because it shows Blacks and Whites relating to one another and fighting side by side for a common cause. The issues that it addresses are social justice, housing, and employment for the underclass. *The Living Newspaper* was a kind of documentary production based upon news, information, and contemporary social problems. This was one of the most unique kinds of theater produced by the Federal Theater Project. The popularity of the *Living Newspaper* was a direct result of the influence of socialism after the Russian Revolution. *Living Newspapers* expressed a concern for the underclass, urged workers to unionize, and vocalized a distrust of the capitalist system after the stock market crash. Some of the productions actually named politicians. The political nature of the *Living Newspapers* led to the downfall of the Federal Theater Project as a whole. In the *Living newspapers* an offstage narrator voice frequently functioned as a Greek chorus who represented the "voice of the people. Although they were also fictional the author ordered and constructed the text , they were immediate, direct, and considered to be politically dangerous. *One Third of a Nation* was the most renown of the *Living*

Newspapers. Its topic was tenement conditions and several different versions of it played simultaneously throughout the country. There were only two African American Living Newspapers ever written and neither of them was actually performed. The title referred to the stars of the Confederacy and the bars to freedom imposed there. The "little man" was an anonymous Connecticut Yankee. The script described incidents related to Hartford life including the landing of the Amistad slave ship, the condition of the urban slums, and the difficulty of finding housing within the city. There were allegorical characters called Tuberculosis, Syphilis, etc. In the play, these characters would seize black children and toss them offstage. Characters also imitated local politicians and quote their stances on racial discrimination verbatim. The records of the Federal Theater Project indicate that the central office asked for revisions in the original script, presumably to tone down the material, however the play was never performed. In this play two couples, one white and one black, reflect upon the history of African Americans in the United States. The excerpt in your text is incomplete, but it provides a good example of the type of dialogue that was used in these productions. The set for *Liberty Deferred* was a huge map of the United States map. In the second act of the play a character named Jim Crow explains how his power operates in both the north and the south. *Lynchtopia* is in the play as a destination for lynching victims. It is somewhere between heaven and hell, and victims are judged by how many of their constitutional rights have been violated. The play script estranged both southerners and northern white liberals. Consequently, it was never performed. As the FTP matured, its activities became highly censored. Some thought it a waste of taxpayer money. The project was a unique experiment in government sponsorship of socially activist art.

Discussion Questions 1 What do you think were the disadvantages of having African Americans create plays in separate facilities under White management? What were the advantages? Should the United States government fund controversial political art?

Chapter 8 : The Harlem Renaissance

The collection contains over a hundred posters related to Federal Theatre Project sponsored productions. To find these posters, select Browse by Creators: Federal Theatre Project (U.S.) and select the "Gallery View" button to view thumbnail images of the search results.

Chapter 9 : Federal theatre plays - ECU Libraries Catalog

The Federal Theatre came into being because the Government of the United States took the position that the talents of these professional theatre workers, together with the skills of painters, musicians and writers, made up a part of the national wealth which America could not afford to lose.