Exemplar Essay #1—Score of (high) 9*

The Great Depression in the late 20s and most of the 30s in America was caused by many factors such as overspeculation, over-production, overly-stimulated stock market trading, and underconsumption. When Franklin D. Roosevelt assumed his presidency, he proposed to a troubled nation the new Deal—a socialistic-natured program where the government would assume responsibility for providing employment, stimulate industrial production, and provide its citizens with basic needs. Although there were some confusions and contradictions at first, the New Deal did ameliorate the United States’ economy by providing jobs for the unemployed and did stimulate the economy through deficit spending. Its impact on the federal government is fundamental in that it reversed the non-interfering policy of the previous Republican presidents and forever implanted a federal role on regulating the economy and providing support to its citizens.

The emphasis of the New Deal program was stimulating the economy by increasing demand via government deficit spending. Overthrowing the prudence of a balanced budget, Roosevelt strived to cure the Great Depression by raising demand on goods and services, thus lowering unemployment and increasing industrial output. The first step he took to achieve this goal was stabilizing the financial world by bringing back people’s confidence in banks. The Glass-Steagall Act created the FDIC and ensured a government payment to citizens who lost a certain amount of their savings due to a bank’s bankruptcy. The stabilization of the financial market was an efficient way to deal with the Great Depression because it provided the needed structure for all other New Deal policies.

Besides stabilizing the banks, Roosevelt aimed to solve unemployment and stimulate industrial output. His CCC program put thousands of young men into working on conservation projects throughout the nation. In addition, the TVA project not only stimulated the employment of construction workers, but also modernized the backward Tennessee Valley. Some politicians like Senator Robert Wagner referred to these acts as “accelerating its pace towards socialism and communism,” claiming that the government overspending would just lead to a deeper recession (Doc B). Yet, this perspective was incomplete in that
these opponents to the New Deal failed to see that government involvement was needed to bring back the
close confidence of the people and to provide jobs to those who were willing to work, but could not find
employment. Another attack on the New Deal was that its acts contradicted one another. As stated by
William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. in *The Hand of Improvidence*, “some [programs] assisted and some retarded
the recovery of industrial activity” as “a bureaucracy in Washington grew by leaps and bounds” (Doc D).
This view was true in that Roosevelt did not have a clear plan for his new Deal when he was running for
the presidency in 1932—other than “Happy Days Are Here Again.” However, as the New Deal matured,
its efficiency eventually increased. The attacks on the New Deal were frequently unjustified.

The most controversial issue of the effectiveness of the New Deal was probably centered on the
National Recovery Administration, a Committee composed of labor union leaders and business owners
alike from many industries. However, the interests between the union leaders and the business people
clashed constantly. As part of the NRA, the union leaders promised not to strike in return for promised
jobs and price-stabilization. Media outlets such as NBC proclaimed this agreement was an oppression of
the workers (Doc G). Indeed, this argument against the NRA went so far that the Supreme Court
eventually declared the NRA unconstitutional. Charles Evans Hughes stated in the decision that “the
authority of the federal government may not by pushed to such an extreme” (Doc F). The NRA case
showed that although Roosevelt’s New Deal attempted to increase industrial efficiency, the president did
make crucial mistakes in his planning. However, when viewed as a means to decrease unemployment
(Doc J), develop national infrastructure, and conservation, the benefits far outweigh small errors like the
NRA.

Besides the immediate effect on the national economy and the Great Depression, the New Deal
also increased the role of the federal government in that it ensured intervention to maintain economic
stability and support the welfare of American citizens. Contrary to people’s belief that the New Deal was
a product of the natural evolution of increasing government involvement, as depicted in the cartoon in
*The Evening Star* (Doc C), the Great Depression was what really led to the multiplication of this gigantic
The Republican presidents who preceded Roosevelt—such as Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover—all supported non-governmental intervention in the needs of the people. Roosevelt reversed this policy of “rugged individualism” by creating social welfare acts such as social security (Doc E), which made the federal government responsible for peoples’ retirement needs. Some media sources praised this government intervention as “efficient” and “modern” (Doc H). In other words, FDR’s social programs were embraced by many people and the policy of small government left behind forever in the 1920s. Later on the government began to provide not only for some of Americans’ social needs, but also to regulate the economy through the approach of Keynesian deficit spending during the Second New Deal. The New Deal also addressed issues such as racial prejudice as stated in the editorial in *The Crisis* (Doc I) and established the legacy of government involvement in integration that was fulfilled during the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

The Great Depression was a special time in US history. It not only taught America many hard-earned economic lessons, but it also brought forth the social, economic and political changes connected with the New Deal. The size of the federal government has increased since, and government policies have continued to build on some of the ideas of the New Deal.

*Why does this essay earn a “high” 9?*

1. There is a clear thesis that is well-developed.
2. It has an effective analysis of the responses, their effectiveness, and the changing role of the government.
3. It demonstrates a thorough understanding of the economic thrust of the New Deal.
4. It has a good sense of chronology.
5. Among the New Deal programs, it makes distinctions between permanent reform and short-term relief measures.
6. It makes substantial use of documents, which are integrated into the essay.
7. It has an abundance of specific and relevant outside information.
8. A few minor grammar errors do not detract from the quality of the essay.