“One Third of a Nation” and the Federal Theater Project: Staging History in the Classroom
National Council for History Education
Museum of the City of New York Presentation

AGENDA:
Introduction
Review of the One Third of A Nation Script
Primary Source Document Quick Read
Script Write and Performance

QUICK READ AND WRITE:
Choose one of the four documents to read to silently read
Review your document again highlighting a provocative or informative sentence
In small groups, discuss your documents noting a common theme
Share the sentences you underlined and piece them together in a one minute script supporting your theme.
Franklin D. Roosevelt  Second Inaugural Address  Wednesday, January 20, 1937

I see a great nation, upon a great continent, blessed with a great wealth of natural resources. Its hundred and thirty million people are at peace among themselves; they are making their country a good neighbor among the nations. I see a United States which can demonstrate that, under democratic methods of government, national wealth can be translated into a spreading volume of human comforts hitherto unknown, and the lowest standard of living can be raised far above the level of mere subsistence.

But here is the challenge to our democracy: In this nation I see tens of millions of its citizens—a substantial part of its whole population—who at this very moment are denied the greater part of what the very lowest standards of today call the necessities of life.

I see millions of families trying to live on incomes so meager that the pall of family disaster hangs over them day by day.

I see millions whose daily lives in city and on farm continue under conditions labeled indecent by a so-called polite society half a century ago.

I see millions denied education, recreation, and the opportunity to better their lot and the lot of their children.

I see millions lacking the means to buy the products of farm and factory and by their poverty denying work and productiveness to many other millions.

I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished.

But it is not in despair that I paint you that picture. I paint it for you in hope—because the nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it, proposes to paint it out. We are determined to make every American citizen the subject of his country’s interest and concern; and we will never regard any faithful law-abiding group within our borders as superfluous. The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

New York Jobs for New Yorkers.
To the Editor of The New York Times:

This is a letter of protest which strangely enough is written by an employment manager and has to do with the overwhelming influx of out-of-town people looking for work here. I am well aware there can be no restriction placed upon travel. but I am also only too well aware that this dreadful unemployment situation is being daily made more so by the hordes of Southerners, Middle Westerners, Down Easterners and others who come here and absorb the few jobs that are available.

Frankly, I am tired of turning away capable born New Yorkers and then hearing of an out-of-towner obtaining work, generally, as they phrase it, “by a lucky break.” Can’t we begin now to work and plan to secure much-needed work in New York for bona fide residents?

C. J. CHARLES.
New York, Aug. 19, 1930

The New York Times
Published: August 23, 1930
2,000,000 IN SLUMS FACE HOUSING CRISIS

Witnesses at Post Hearing Say Most of Old-Law Tenements Must Be Torn Down.

HOME SHORTAGE LOOMS

State or Federal Aid Seen as Only Possibility of Getting Adequate New Dwellings.

A dismal picture of the living conditions of the more than 2,000,000 persons in the city who dwell in "old-law" slum tenements was painted yesterday before the city Housing Authority, as the La Guardia administration opened a drive to obtain State or Federal aid for widespread slum demolition.

Harry M. Prince, First Deputy Tenement House Commissioner, read into the records figures showing that since 1931 there have been 1,228 deaths as a result of fires in old-law tenements, compared with 271 in new-law buildings.

McElligott Lists Fire Hazards

Following him on the stand, Fire Commissioner John J. McElligott, testifying with the air of putting into words what to him was an old story, declared that the reasons were elementary—wooden stairs, wooden wainscoting, inflammables everywhere.

The New York Times
Published: December 18, 1936

4,000 MARCH IN FIGHT ON HARLEM RENT RISE

Rain Fails to Halt Parade of 3½ Miles—Increases of 3 to 30% Are Charged.

More than 4,000 Negro men, women and children paraded three and one-half miles through Harlem yesterday afternoon as a protest against rent increases and housing conditions there. Later the marchers assembled in Rockland Palace, 155th Street and Eighth Avenue, where speakers urged them to reject any increased rent demands of the landlords.

The parade was sponsored by the Consolidated Tenants League of New York City and included more than 1,000 followers of Father Divine, whose banners advertised peace and Father Divine, but did not indicate any concern with the rent problem. Some of the placards borne by other marchers read: "Don't be a slave to your greedy landlord" and "Abolish firetraps and insanitary housing conditions."