**AmCon 201 | *Critical Analysis Assignment***

**The task** In this assignment, assess the quality of the argument made in a particular text or texts about New Deal social policy by evaluating its “basics.” By this, we mean the fundamental aspects of empirically based arguments -- the **assumptions** that underlie the attempt to explain the phenomenon, and the **evidence** marshalled to support specific claims about it. Along with assumptions and evidence, you should consider the author’s engagement with **alternative explanations** or **competing theories** about the phenomenon, either explicitly or by inference.

Below is the list of questions about these three dimensions of critical analysis, from which you should respond to questions relating to two or three of them. For instance, you may choose to engage with two questions — one each about the argument’s evidence and its engagement with competing explanations. In total (for both or all three questions *together*), your response should be at least 1000 words long.

Note that your responses need not form a coherent synthesis about the text in question (e.g., as you would seek to do in an analytical essay). Instead, your engagement can remain “granular,” or focused on the particulars of each question, e.g., by considering the strength or weakness of specific “pieces” of evidence. In fact, given that your response to each question will be relatively short (i.e., 300-500 words), this assignment essentially requires you to concentrate on specifics, and to do so in a sharp, focused way. In terms of what a final product should look like, peruse the “Sample critical analysis” that we provide.

**Critical questions**

**Assumptions**

* What are the assumptions that the author operates under? To what degree are these assumptions valid and accurate?
  + *Paradigmatic/Causal: What does the author assume about “how the world works” — about the basic causes of what we see and know, its most fundamental explanations? And what does the author presume about how things change: what is presumed to happen if “X” is done?*

**Evidence**

* When claims and contentions are made, to what degree are they grounded in documented empirical evidence? When broad generalizations are advanced, do they rest convincingly on the evidence presented?

**Alternative explanations/competing theories**

* What potentially fruitful explanations or interpretations of the material are neglected or omitted?
* Does the author explicitly consider competing theories about the matter in question?
  + *[If so] Does the author engage plausibly with those explanations?*
  + *[If not] Does the lack of engagement weaken the author’s argument? How, concretely?*