

History 131/Literature 130
The History and Literature of the Great Depression

Spring 2006 – Inaugural Year – U.C. Merced
MonWed 3:30-4:50

Instructors: Professor Jan Goggans, Professor Sean Malloy
Email: jgoggans@ucmerced.edu, smalloy@ucmerced.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday, 12 – 1
Individual appointments available on request
Course Website: Available via UCMCROPS

Course Description

The period from 1929 to 1941 marks one of the most extraordinary times in American history, and the arts. The government's response to the economic turmoil of the Great Depression was, along with the host of economic programs it established, to fund a multitude of public arts program designed to remind American citizens close to being overwhelmed by "hard times," that there was, indeed, something remarkable about being American. Literature, theatre, photography, music – all flourished under the patronage of FDR and the New Deal.

The American people themselves responded in strikingly divergent ways to the multiple challenges posed by the Great Depression. While the 1930s are traditionally portrayed as the decade of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, they were also the decade of California socialist Upton Sinclair, union stalwart John L. Lewis, radical writer Richard Wright, and arch-isolationist Charles Lindbergh. As these larger-than-life figures jostled for position on the national stage, millions of ordinary Americans struggled to find work or put food on the table.

In this course we will examine the multiple responses of the American people and their leaders to the crises of the 1930s. Students will read a wide variety of literary responses to the Depression as well as primary source historical documents. We will discuss these texts in class with an eye toward developing a better understanding of the way Americans thought and argued about the pressing issues of the day. We will also consider how the controversies of the 1930s helped to shape modern America and continue to linger in contemporary life.

Course Materials

Required books:

Dashiell Hammet, *Red Harvest*
Josephine Johnson, *Now In November*
John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*
Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun*
Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*
Zora Neal Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Harper Lee, *To Kill A Mockingbird*
T. H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years*
Lizabeth Cohen, *Making A New Deal*

Online reader: Some readings, audio files, and linked websites have been placed online and are available at our UCMCROPS website in the “Resources” folder grouped by week. Please print out these readings and bring them to your section for easy reference during discussion.

Course Requirements and Grading

Grading breakdown:

| | | |
|---------------------------|-----|-------------------------|
| Short paper (2-4 pages) | 10% | Due in class February 8 |
| Midterm exam | 20% | February 27 |
| Documentary project | 15% | Due in class on April 5 |
| Final paper (10-12 pages) | 40% | Due in class on May 10 |
| Class participation | 15% | |

For general guidelines with respect to grading criteria (*e. g.* “What is an A paper?”), please consult the following reference:

www.newhum.com/for_teachers/grading_criteria/suggested_grading_criteria.html

Written assignments turned in up to 24 hours late will receive a 1/3 grade reduction (*e.g.* an A would become an A-). Work turned in between 24-72 hours late will be lowered a full grade except in cases of serious illness or emergency. Any work turned in after 72 hours late will not be accepted and will count as an F. Exams must be taken at the scheduled times.

Special Needs

I welcome students with learning or other disabilities into this class. I encourage you to speak to me and to Special Student Services (107 Kolligan Library) about your situation as soon as possible so that we can figure out the best way to promote your success in this course.

Academic Honesty

Students and professors are governed by the Interim Academic Honesty Policy, which is available at the Students First Center at Kolligan Library. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses which in some cases may be grounds for suspension or dismissal. Basic guidelines to avoid these problems are outlined below, but if you are in any doubt, please consult the instructor or your Teaching Assistant.

Plagiarism in written work (such as the two assigned papers) is not always easy to define. As a simple guideline, if you submit your own work, you will avoid all serious types of plagiarism. If you use a direct quotation or borrow an interpretive idea from another work, you must cite it. If you paraphrase another document, you must cite it. The basic standard: If you use any idea that did not originate in our own mind, you must cite it. For information about original work,

citation standards, and other guidelines to best academic practices, see
<http://www.library.ucla.edu/b Bruinsuccess/>

Week 1: Introduction to the History and Literature of the 1930s

January 18: Introduction to the Course

Week 2: American in the “Roaring Twenties”

January 23: Middletown, USA

Reading:

Liz Cohen, *Making A New Deal*, 11-52.

Helen and Robert Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, 1929, 53-89.

Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 5-33

January 25: Poisonville

Reading:

Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest*

Week 3: The Great Crash and the Great Depression

January 30: Crash!

Readings:

“Let’s Go!” editorial, *Business Week*, November 2, 1929.

Fredrick Lewis Allen, “Crash!” *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*, 1931.

Elmer Davis, “Miniature Golf to the Rescue,” *Harper’s Magazine*, December 1930.

“Henry Ford on Self-Help,” advertisement, *The Literary Digest*, June 18, 1932.

“It’s Hard for A Hungry Citizen to be a Good Citizen,” advertisement, *Fortune*, November 1932.

Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 37-103 (skim)

February 1: Adrift in the Great Depression

Reading:

Lorena Hickok to Harry Hopkins, September 3, 1933.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Babylon Revisited,” 1931, 616-633.

Excerpts from John dos Passos *U.S.A.* trilogy, 443-458.

Jack Conroy, *The Disinherited*, 1933, 3-40.

Audio:

Rudy Vallee, “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” October 27, 1932. [3:36]

Barbeque Bob, "We Sure Got Hard Times Now," Barbecue Bob, April 18, 1930. [3:25]

Week 4: FDR and the New Deal

February 6: FDR and the First 100 Days

Readings:

Franklin D. Roosevelt, acceptance speech, July 2, 1932
Herbert Hoover, "Address at the Coliseum in Des Moines, Iowa, October 4, 1932
Franklin D. Roosevelt, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933
Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Outlining the New Deal Program," May 7, 1933

Audio:

Herbert Hoover, campaign address, 1932. [1:52]

Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 145-210 (skim and take notes).

February 8: America Responds to the New Deal

Readings:

Anne O'Hare McCormick, "This America: A Re-Discovery," September 1934.

Short Paper Due in Class

Week 5: The Dust Bowl

February 13: Literary Perspectives on the Dust Bowl

Reading:

Josephine Johnson, *Now In November*

February 15: A New Deal for Farmers?

Reading:

Claude V. Dunnagan, "Get Out and Hoe," 1939.
William R. Amberson, "The New Deal for Share-Croppers," 1934.
Henry Wallace, "The Rules of the Game," *Survey Graphic*, July 1934, 317-321.
Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 339-391

Week 6

February 20: President's Day Holiday – NO CLASS

February 22: American Exodus

Reading:

Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*.
Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 421-459.

Film: "The Plow That Broke the Plains," 1936

Week 7

February 27: California Dreamin'

Reading:

Upton Sinclair and the EPIC campaign, Lauren Coodley, ed., *The Land of Orange Groves and Jails*, 174-211.

Kevin Starr, "EPIC Intentions: The Gubernatorial Campaign of 1934," *Endangered Dreams*, 121-155.

Film: "California Election News #1 and #2," 1936.

March 1: MIDTERM

Week 8: Labor in the 1930s: Urban Industrial Workers

March 6: The SF Waterfront Strike

Reading:

Liz Cohen, 99-212.

March 8: Industrial Workers in Chicago

Reading:

Liz Cohen, 213-368.

Week 9: Labor in the 1930s: Agricultural Workers

March 13: Agricultural Strike Background

Reading:

Paul Taylor, "Documentary History of the Strike of the Cotton Pickers in California 1933, *On the Ground in the 1930s*, 17-158.

Devra Weber, "*Sin Fronteras: Mexican Workers*," *Dark Sweat, White Gold*, 48-78

March 15: *In Dubious Battle*

Reading:

Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle*

Week 10: Arts in the 1930s

March 20: Federal Art

Reading:

Eleanor Roosevelt, "The New Governmental Interest in the Arts," May 1934.

Arshile Gorky, "My Murals for the Newark Airport."

Beniamino Benvenuto Bufano, "For the Present We Are Busy."

Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 273-294.

March 22: Federal Theater Project

Reading:

"The Federal Theater Project," Eric Bentley, ed., *Thirty Years of Treason: Excerpts from Hearings Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, 1938-1968*.

New York: Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 3-7, 18-25, 30-41. [25]

Hallie Flanagan, "Is This the Time and Place?" October 5, 1935. [8]

<http://newdeal.feri.org/ftp/ftp001.htm>

Elizabeth McCausland, "Save the Arts Projects," *The Nation*, July 17, 1937. [4]

<http://newdeal.feri.org/texts/868.htm>

Film: *One Third of a Nation*

Week 11: Spring Break

NO CLASS

Week 12: Race and the American South

April 3: To Kill A Mockingbird

Reading:

Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

April 5: To Kill A Mockingbird (film)

Week 13: Jim Crow in the Great Depression

April 10: The Jim Crow South

Readings:

Hilton Butler, "Lynch Law in Action," *The New Republic*, July 22, 1931, 256-258.

Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow: An Autobiographical Sketch," New York: The Viking Press, 1937.

Robert McElvaine, ed., *Down & Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the "Forgotten Man,"* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1983, 82-94.

Eleanor Roosevelt, "The Negro and Social Change," *Opportunity, Journal of Negro Life*, January 1936.

Luther C. Wandall, "A Negro in the CCC," *The Crisis*, August 1935.
<http://newdeal.feri.org/aaccc/aaccc01.htm>

American slave narratives (select one from the New Deal Network site)

Audio:

Billie Holiday (written by Lewis Anderson), "Strange Fruit," 1938. [4:53]

April 12: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Reading:

Zora Neal Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Week 14: Public Works in the 1930s

April 17: Woody Guthrie and Grand Coulee Dam

Reading:

Richard White, *The Organic Machine*, 59-88.

Woody Guthrie, *Bound for Glory*

Jan Goggans, "Woody Guthrie," *American Radical and Reform Writers*, 182-191

April 19: The TVA and the Boulder Dam (AKA the Hoover Dam)

Reading:

George C. Stoney, "A Valley to Hold To," July 1940.

Joseph Stevens, "A Deadly Desert Place," *Hoover Dam: An American Adventure*, 47-80.

Andrew J. Dunar and Dennis McBride, eds., *Building Hoover Dam*, 57-83.

Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 460-485.

Week 15: The War At Home

April 24: Gender and Family in the Great Depression

Reading:

Sarah Berry, *Screen Style*, 1-94

Wilma McDaniels, "Merced Country Names," "The Red Coffee Can," "Self-Pronouncing," "The Gum Drop Christmas," "Gravy Says a Lot," "Remembering Farm Women," "Entrapment," "Finding Old Perfume Bottle," "Frying Potatoes."
Meridel Lesueur, "Women on the Breadlines," *New Masses*, January 1932, 5-7

April 26: Johnny Got his Gun

Reading:

Dalton Trumbo, *Johnny Got His Gun*

Week 16: Isolationists and Internationalists

May 1: War Comes to America (film)

Reading:

Peter C. Rollins, "Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* Film Series and Our American Dream."

May 3: The Great Debate

Reading:

Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Four Freedoms" speech, January 6, 1941, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt: War and Aid to Democracies, 1941*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950, 663-673.

The Atlantic Charter, August 14, 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941, 368-9.

Address by Charles A. Lindbergh, April 23, 1941, America First Committee pamphlet.

America First Committee Principles, n.d. [circa 1940-41].

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Fireside Chat on National Defense, September 11, 1941, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt: War and Aid to Democracies, 1941*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950, 384-89.

Henry L. Stimson Diary, December 7, 1941. [4]

Audio:

Charles Lindbergh, address on American neutrality, September 11, 1941. [9:15]
"Lindbergh," Woody Guthrie, 1942.

Week 17: America on the Eve of War

May 8: The New Deal Legacy

Reading:

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 1937.

Francis Perkins, "A Little Left of Center," *The Roosevelt I Knew*. New York: The

Viking Press, 1946, 328-333.

David M. Kennedy, "What the New Deal Did," *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 363-380. [17]

Watkins, *The Hungry Years*, 489-520.

May 10: Conclusion