

## **New Deal America**

History 395, Spring 2000

MWF 1:00 to 1:50, 108 O'Brian

Instructor: Dr. Gail Radford, 583 Park Hall

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Office Hours: Mondays 2:00–4:00, and by appointment

### ***Course Description***

The economic collapse of the 1930s known as the “Great Depression” caused Americans to rethink core assumptions about politics and culture and led to a variety of changes generally lumped together under the rubric of the “New Deal.” The innovations of the New Deal were controversial in their own time—and they remain so today. Indeed, one could argue that this period serves as a benchmark in American history, with politicians continually promising either to roll back the New Deal or to carry on its legacy. For this reason, the course will examine not only the transformations that took place during the 1930s, and how these were understood and evaluated by people at the time, but also what these changes mean for us today.

Students will be encouraged to develop their own perspectives based on reading and discussing a variety of first-hand accounts, analyses by scholars, and contemporary news articles that debate such New Deal topics as Social Security, government labor policy, federal funding for the arts, and the best way to memorialize President Roosevelt and his administration.

The course also aims to introduce students to the historical materials that are becoming available on the world wide web. Some of the required reading will be found on the web, and students are encouraged to browse in various sites that will be announced in class, especially the New Deal Network’s award-winning website <http://newdeal.feri.org>.

### ***Books***

You should purchase:

Kenneth J. Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal: Religion and Reform in Depression Pittsburgh* (1999)

Alice Lynd and Staughton Lynd, eds., *Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers* ([1973]; 1988)

Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America 1929-1941*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1993)

Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (1996)

Upton Sinclair, *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked* ([1934]; 1994)



Charles Turzak, *Depression—Man with Shovel*, 1935, linocut, 2.75x2".

## ***Course Requirements and Grading***

1. **Exams:** There will be two exams. Each will count for 25% of your final grade for the course. The readings and lectures complement each other; you are responsible for all material covered in either context.
2. **Short Assignments:** There will be 14 opportunities, of which 10 must be taken, to write short (1-2 page) assignments that will be graded on a pass-fail basis. The grade for the short assignments will count for 30% of the final grade. Students who receive a passing grade on 10 of these will get an “A” for this (30%) portion of the course grade. Nine passing assignments will be an “B,” eight will be a “C,” seven a “D,” and six or less an “F.” These assignments should be typed or computer-printed (although limited exceptions are possible). Since the purpose of these assignments is to help students think through issues as they are covered in the course and come to class ready to discuss them, credit cannot be given unless an assignment is turned in during the class when it is due. No credit can be given if the writer is unable to attend the class for whatever reason. Everyone can skip four of these assignments with no penalty. However, each person must turn in an initial paper the first or second week of class.
3. **Paper:** There will be a 4–5 page paper on issues raised by Upton Sinclair’s book. (More specific instructions will be provided later in the course.) The paper will be due March 24, and will count for 20% of the grade. Students can rewrite this paper for a higher grade. To take this option, come in for a consultation with the instructor during office hours, and turn in the rewritten paper together with the original by April 21. (Rewrites will be accepted only if these conditions are met.)

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## ***Course Schedule and Reading Assignments***

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### Week 1

Readings            McElvaine, Introduction to the 1993 edition of *Great Depression*  
                          Tillie Olsen, “The ‘30s: A Vision of Fear and Hope,” *Newsweek*, Jan. 3, 1994  
                          (on reserve)

### Classes

Jan. 19            Course Introduction  
Jan. 21            The Economy and Politics in the 1920s  
                          L Short Assignment #1 Due

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### Week 2

Readings            McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapters 2-4  
                          William Cronon, “Dust Bowl” in Alan Brinkley, et al., *American History*,  
                          8th ed. (on reserve)

### Classes

Jan. 24            American Culture in the “Jazz Age”  
Jan. 26            The Economy Crumbles  
Jan. 28            Environmental Crisis of the 1930s  
                          L Short Assignment #2 Due

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Week 3

Readings Heineman, *A Catholic New Deal*, chapters 1-3

Classes

- Jan. 31 Social Welfare before the 1930s  
Feb. 2 American Religions Confront Mass Poverty  
Feb. 4 The Relief Crisis of the Early Depression  
L Short Assignment #3 Due
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Week 4

Readings McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapters 5-7  
Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Extemporaneous Remarks at Thanksgiving Day Party at Warm Springs, Georgia" (1934), <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1934g.htm>  
William H. Chafe, "Biographical Sketch" of Eleanor Roosevelt, in Joan Hoff-Wilson and Marjorie Lightman, eds., *Without Precedent* (on reserve)

Classes

- Feb. 7 The New Deal Re-Alignment of American Politics  
Feb. 9 Who Was Franklin Roosevelt, and How Should We Remember Him?  
Feb. 11 The Controversial Eleanor Roosevelt  
L Short Assignment #4 Due
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Week 5

Readings Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, chapters 2-4 & 6

Classes

- Feb. 14 The "First Hundred Days" of Roosevelt's New Deal  
Feb. 16 Housing Problems and Proposed Solutions before the Depression  
Feb. 18 The PWA Builds Housing in Harlem  
L Short Assignment #5 Due
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Week 6

Readings McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapter 10-11  
Steve Forbes, "How to Replace Social Security," *Wall Street Journal* 12/18/96; Robert Eisner, "Cut Social Security? No, Expand It," *Wall Street Journal* 12/10/97 (both on reserve)

Classes

- Feb. 21 Dr. Townsend's Plan and the Movement for Old-Age Pensions  
Feb. 23 Roosevelt and the Social Security Act  
Feb. 25 Today's Debates Over New Deal Social Welfare Programs; Exam review  
L Short Assignment #6 Due
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Week 7

Readings Andrew Bergman, "The Gangsters," chapter 1 of *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films* (on reserve)

Classes

Feb. 28 **Exam #1**  
Mar. 1 Movie: Public Enemy; **Meet in 31 Capen**  
Mar. 3 Why Were Gangsters Appealing Figures in the Depression?  
L Short Assignment #7 Due

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**SPRING BREAK:** Mar. 6-11

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Week 8

Readings Sinclair, *I, Candidate for Governor*, entire book

Classes

Mar. 13 Upton Sinclair and American Socialism  
Mar. 15 Sinclair's "End Poverty in California" Campaign  
Mar. 17 EPIC, Share Our Wealth, and the New Deal Compared  
L Short Assignment #8 Due

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Week 9

Readings Martha Bruere, Report to Harry Hopkins on conditions in Buffalo, New York (Nov. 1934); <http://newdeal.feri.org/hopkins/hop26.htm>  
Martha Gellhorn, Report to Harry Hopkins on Conditions in Providence, Rhode Island (Nov. 1934) <http://newdeal.feri.org/hopkins/hop21.htm>

Classes

Mar. 20 Conditions of Life in New York State During the Early New Deal  
Mar. 22 **No Class Meeting**  
Mar. 24 Could Sinclair Have Won the Governorship of California?  
Discussion and Video, *We Have a Plan*; **Meet in 31 Capen**  
L Short Assignment #9 Due  
L Upton Sinclair Paper Due

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Week 10

Readings Lynd and Lynd, *Rank and File*, "Introduction" and oral testimonies of Christine Ellis, John Anderson, Stella Nowicki, and Sylvia Woods

Classes

Mar. 27 American Labor Unions Before the Depression  
Mar. 29 The Idea of "Industrial Unions" and the Formation of the CIO  
Mar. 31 Discussion and Documentary, *Union Maids*; **Meet in 31 Capen**  
L Short Assignment #10 Due

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Week 11

Readings

McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapter 13  
Aaron Bernstein, "All's Not Fair in Labor Wars," *Business Week*, 7/19/99,  
and Ricky Baldwin, "We Shouldn't Have to Be Here," *alt: Buffalo  
Alternative Press*, 12/20/99 (on reserve)

Classes

- Apr. 3 Sit-down Strikes and the Memorial Day Massacre: Labor's Offensive and  
Capital's Counteroffensive  
Apr. 5 Discussion & Video, *Labor Organizing in Little Steel*; **Meet in 31 Capen**  
Apr. 7 The WPA's Federal One Program: Jobs for White Collar Workers & Artists  
L Short Assignment #11 Due
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Week 12

Readings

"A New Deal for the Arts," online exhibit of the National Archives  
at <http://www.nara.gov:80/exhall/newdeal/newdeal.html>  
William Graebner, "Norman Rockwell and American Mass Culture: The  
Crisis of Representation in the Great Depression," *Prospects*, vol. 22  
(on reserve)  
Lisa Fischman, "Experiment in Balance," pamphlet for 1998 Show of WPA  
prints at UB Art Gallery (on reserve)

Classes

- Apr. 10 Are the Labor Struggles of the 1930s Relevant for Today? Speaker: Geri  
Ochocinska, Director, United Auto Workers, District 9  
Apr. 12 WPA Prints from the UB Collection: Presentation by Dr. Lisa Fischman,  
UB Art Curator; **Meet at UB Gallery, Center for the Arts**  
Apr. 14 What is Art? Norman Rockwell and Controversies Over Changing Styles  
and Expression of Social Criticism in the Visual Arts  
L Short Assignment #12 Due
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Week 13

Readings

Robert Cronbach, "The New Deal Sculpture Projects," in Francis V.  
O'Conner, ed., *New Deal Art Projects, An Anthology of Memoirs* (on  
reserve)  
"Artistic Freedom for Taxpayers," *National Review*, 10/27/89,  
"Comparisons of WPA and NEA Sentiments," *Knight-Ridder/Tribune  
News Service*, 8/8/97; Bernard A. Weisberger, "Federal Art for Whose  
Sake?" *American Heritage*, 12/92 (all on reserve)  
McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapter 14  
*Optional*: Interested in finding out what New Deal art projects were done  
in your home town? Go to <http://newdeal.feri.org/ndart/> and follow the  
link labeled Map to New York State Public Works of Art

Classes

- Apr. 17 Public Housing and Redevelopment in Buffalo, Lecture by Professor Alfred  
D. Price, UB Department of Planning  
Apr. 19 **Field Trip to A.D. Price (formerly Willert Park) Homes in Buffalo**  
to see WPA sculptures and view early public housing  
Apr. 21 Should Government Support the Arts? Arguments in the 1930s and Today  
L Short Assignment #13  
L Last Day for Sinclair Paper Rewrites
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Week 14

Readings

McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapter 15

Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, chapter 7

Francis MacDonnell, "The Emerald City was the New Deal": E.Y. Harburg and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*," *Journal of American Culture* (1990); (on reserve)

Classes

Apr. 24 What Stopped the Expansion of the New Deal?

Apr. 26 What the New Deal Accomplished, and What It Didn't

Apr. 28 *The Wizard of Oz*—An Appropriate Allegory for the New Deal? Clips from the Movie and Discussion; Exam Review; **Meet in 31Capen**  
L Short Assignment #14 Due

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Week 15

May 1

**Exam #2**

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