

History 463/563: The Great Depression

Daniel Pope

Class meets 12:00-1:20 Tues. and Thurs. in 176 Education

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This syllabus is on the web at <http://www.uoregon.edu/~dapope/463syllabus.htm>. I strongly suggest that you bookmark this on your computer. Links to outlines and PowerPoints for class sessions and information about assignments and exams will be posted here regularly during the term.

Course Description:

This course is officially offered under the generic title of "Topics in American Economic History," and the Great Depression of the 1930s was surely an economic event of major proportions. However, it was more than that, and we will look at some of the political, social and cultural ramifications of economic collapse. This is a History course, and though I will make use of some elementary economic concepts, no coursework in Economics is assumed or required. In fact, there are also no History prerequisites, although I will assume that students know some basic facts about twentieth-century American history. If you find that I'm making references to people, events, etc. that you don't know, please inform me. It's a safe bet that others in the class will also want me to fill in the background more.

For the most part, the course will take a chronological approach, but with several topical emphases. It will stress the following questions:

1. What caused the economic catastrophe? What role did the stock market crash play? Was it the result of misguided policies or fundamental structural problems? And what made the economic depression last so long?

2. Americans still debate whether Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal constituted a drastic shift in politics and the role of the Federal government in American life. If it was, what legacy has it left for us, three-quarters of a century later?

3. What challenges and what opportunities did working-class Americans face during the Depression? How did they respond?

4. In some ways, the Great Depression was a watershed for African Americans. In other ways, African Americans had long experienced hard times, so the Depression may not have been as much of a shock. What did it do African-American hopes and opportunities? Did the decade mark a change in the nation's race policies?

5. Did the economic crisis bring out positive features of Americans' character--compassion for the suffering, a willingness to experiment, a sense of community, etc.--or did it make people less cooperative, more fearful, more selfish, etc.?

6. We've been undergoing an economic crisis that is repeatedly called the worst "since the Great Depression." What does the Great Depression have to tell us about the current economic crisis and how to respond to it?

Requirements :

For undergraduates:

1. A short (3-5 page) paper. Instructions to be posted soon. Due **Tuesday, January 26** and worth about 20% of your course grade.
2. An in-class midterm exam, **Thursday Feb. 4** and worth about 20% of your course grade.
3. A short (3-5 page) paper due **Thursday, March 4** and worth about 20% of your course grade. Instructions to be posted soon.
4. A final exam. An in-class and a take-home option will be available. You may choose one or the other. The in-class exam is scheduled for **8:00 Thursday, March 18**. The take-home is due by the start of the in-class exam. Worth about 40% of your course grade.

For graduate students taking History 563:

1. A research paper or historiographical essay of approximately 10-15 pages, to substitute for the short papers and midterm described in the undergraduate requirements. The paper will be worth approximately 40% of your course grade. We must consult about and agree on your topic by Oct. 24. A brief prospectus that states your topic, lists your main research sources, outlines the questions or hypotheses you are investigating, and gives a tentative outline of the paper's structure is due Nov. 16. The paper itself is due **Wednesday, Nov. 30 at class time**.
2. A final exam, as described in the undergraduate requirements above, also worth about 40% of your grade.
3. I want to consult very soon with the graduate students in the course to set up some additional meeting times during the term. I'll assign some (short) additional readings, based on student interests, for us to discuss. Preparation and participation in these discussions and in the regular class sessions will be worth about 20% of your grade.

Readings:

I have ordered five books at the UO Bookstore. They will be supplemented by some briefer readings which will be available either on the web or as photocopies. The required books are:

Eric Rauchway, *The Great Depression and the New Deal: A Very Short Introduction*
Studs Terkel, *Hard Times* (older and used editions should be available and are completely acceptable)

Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago 1919-1939*

Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children*

John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash: 1929*

Class Sessions: Shortly before or after each class session, I'll link it below to the web outline and notes (or in some cases PowerPoints) that I'll display in class for

that session. I suggest you bookmark this syllabus for ready access--
<http://www.uoregon.edu/~dapope/463syllabus.htm>.

Jan. 5 **The 1920s: Permanent Prosperity or Prelude to Disaster?**

Jan. 7 **The Boom and the Crash**

Jan. 12 **Did the Crash Cause the Depression?**

Jan. 14 **What Did Cause the Great Depression?**

Jan. 19 **Why Did It Last So Long?**

By this date, read: (1) Galbraith, *Great Crash*; (2) Rauchway, pp. 1-55; (3) Christina Romer, "[The Nation in Depression.](#)" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, volume 7, number 2 (Spring 1993), pp.19-39. [From off-campus use this link to get to Romer's article: <http://libproxy.uoregon.edu/login?url=http://www.jstor.org/stable/2138198>. If necessary, log in with your duck ID and password.];(4) Terkel, *Hard Times*, "The Big Money" and "Old Families." Also, read and/or listen to FDR's first Inaugural Address, at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrfirstinaugural.html> or watch it on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MX_v0zxM23Q.

Jan. 21 **FDR and a New Deal--1933**

Jan. 26 **From the First to the Second New Deal** [First short paper due.]

Jan. 28 **Eleanor Roosevelt--The Real Deal**

Feb. 2 **1934: A Year of Crisis--Populist Challenges to the New Deal**

By this date, read: (1) Rauchway, pp.56-104; (2) Terkel, "Concerning the New Deal", "The Doctor, Huey and Mr. Smith" and "The Circuit Rider"; (3) Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, Introduction and chapters 4 and 5. Also, read and/or listen to Huey Long speech on his "Share Our Wealth" program at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5109/>.

Feb. 4 **Midterm Exam**

Feb. 9 **1934: A Year of Crisis--A New Kind of Labor Movement**

Feb. 11 **Industrial Unionism and Radical Impulses**

Feb. 16 **Workers' Lives and Workers' Hopes**

By this date, read: (1) Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, chapters 6-8; (2) Terkel, "Bonnie Laboring Boy", "Three Strikes" and "Scarlet Banners and Novenas."

Feb. 18 **The Scottsboro Case**

Feb. 23 **Race and the New Deal**

Feb. 25 Discussion of Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children*

By this date, read: (1) Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children*, TBA; (2) Robin Kelley, "[We Are Not What We Seem](#)". [From off-campus, use this link: <http://libproxy.uoregon.edu/login?url=http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2079698.pdf> and if necessary login with your duckID and password.]; (3) Terkel, "Man and Boy", Robin Langston (in "God Bless the Child" section), E.D. Nixon (in "Bonnie Laboring Boy" section), Emma Tiller (in "The Farmer is the Man" and in "Strive and Succeed" sections), Horace Cayton (in "Honor and Humiliation" section).

Mar. 2 Depression Culture as Working Class Culture

Mar. 4 Depression Culture as Consumer Culture [Second short paper due.]

By this date, read: (1) Terkel, "High Life" and "The Fine and Lively Arts"; (2) Warren Susman, "The Culture of the Thirties" (I'll put this on e-reserve).

Mar. 9 The End of the New Deal and the Coming of War

By this date, read: Rauchway, pp.105-133.

Mar. 11 The Great Depression: Lessons Learned and Unlearned