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:


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

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

| Week 1 | Readings          | McElvaine, Introduction to the 1993 edition of *Great Depression*  
|        | (on reserve)      |
| Classes |                  |
| Jan. 19 | Course Introduction |
| Jan. 21 | The Economy and Politics in the 1920s  
|         | Short Assignment #1 Due |

| Week 2 | Readings          | McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapters 2-4  
| Classes |                  |
| Jan. 24 | American Culture in the “Jazz Age” |
| Jan. 26 | The Economy Crumbles |
| Jan. 28 | Environmental Crisis of the 1930s  
|         | Short Assignment #2 Due |
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
  
Short Assignment #3 Due

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](http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1934g.htm)

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
  
Short Assignment #4 Due

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
  
Short Assignment #5 Due

Week 6
Readings  
McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapter 10-11

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
  
Short Assignment #6 Due
**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?  
  - *Short Assignment #7 Due*

**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  
  - *Short Assignment #8 Due*

**Week 9**

**Readings**

**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**  
  - *Short Assignment #9 Due*  
  - Upton Sinclair Paper Due

**Week 10**

**Readings**

**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**  
  - *Short Assignment #10 Due*
### Week 11

**Readings**
- McElvaine, *Great Depression*, chapter 13

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

### Week 12

**Readings**

**Classes**
1. **Apr. 10** Are the Labor Struggles of the 1930s Relevant for Today? Speaker: Geri Ochocinska, Director, United Auto Workers, District 9
2. **Apr. 12** WPA Prints from the UB Collection: Presentation by Dr. Lisa Fischman, UB Art Curator; **Meet at UB Gallery, Center for the Arts**
   - Short Assignment #12 Due

### Week 13

**Readings**
- 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/](http://newdeal.feri.org/ndart/) and follow the link labeled Map to New York State Public Works of Art

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

Week 15
May 1    **Exam #2**