

The New Era and the New Deal: The United States, 1920-1940

(9:30 - 10:20A MWF 61 SH)

Instructor

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Office Hours, WF 10:30-11:30

Departmental Information

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Students are expected to attend class on a regular basis. University policy requires that students be permitted to make up examinations missed because of illness, mandatory religious obligations, certain University activities, or unavoidable circumstances. It is in the student's best interest to inform her or his instructors of any prolonged absence from class.

Please notify me if you have a disability that may require modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements.

A handout outlining College-wide policies regarding complaint procedures, plagiarism, and cheating is available through the term from any Departmental office.

I. Introduction

The 1920s and 1930s, bounded by two World Wars and punctuated by the Great Depression, mark a pivotal era in American history. World War I thrust the U. S. into the twentieth century. The war experience accelerated patterns of economic, social and demographic change, and the postwar era sparked sharp cultural and political debate over the central issues of the modern American experience: global politics, race, the rights of women, immigration, economic regulation, labor relations, social welfare, and political dissent. The Great Depression cast a shadow of economic privation over all of these issues. The ways in which Americans experienced and responded to the economic crisis would shape politics, culture, and society for the rest of the century. And World War II not only ended the Depression but recast politics and political culture around new concerns: the demands of the "Bretton Woods" global economic order, the politics of the Cold War, and panacea of economic growth. Our survey of these years stresses both political and economic issues, and the ways in which different Americans experienced the interwar years. Rather than learn a core of historical "facts," I expect you to gain a broad and critical understanding of main currents in modern American history, and to pursue topics of particular interest in your written work.

II. Readings

The required course reading, available at the IMU bookstore, is as follows:

Colin Gordon, *Major Problems in American History, 1920-1945* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999)

The topical reading lists at the end of each chapter in *Major Problems* will serve as a guide for supplemental reading, especially (see below) for your essay research.

III. Written Assignments

Your written work for this course consists of an essay written in three stages, and a final exam.

III.i Essay

The core assignment for this course is a short essay (10-15 typewritten pages). Your essay should make use of relevant course readings, and additional library research. The focus of these essays will be on one of the major policy innovations of the New Deal. I've listed some possible topics below; variations or alternatives may be worked out with the Instructor.

Economic Regulation (National Recovery Act)
 Labor Policy (NRA, Wagner Act)
 Minimum Wage, Overtime (Fair Labor Standards Act)
 Employment Discrimination (Fair Employment Practices Commission)
 Welfare, Old Age Security, Unemployment, Health Care (Social Security Act)
 Foreign Trade (Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act)
 Agricultural Policy (Agricultural Adjustment Administration)
 Arts and Culture (Works Progress Administration)
 Housing (Federal Housing Administration)

For each of these, you should craft an essay that considers the pre-New Deal history of this problem or policy; the policies and perspectives of the New Deal (this will be the bulk of your essay); and the contemporary situation. On welfare, for example, your essay would touch on pre-1932 patterns of federal relief, the New Deal debate, and the historical context for the recent changes in federal welfare policy. In each case, your essay should answer the following questions: What was the federal approach to this problem before 1932? How did the New Deal (1932-1945) change federal policies and responsibilities? What is the current state of federal policy or responsibility in this area? How have the debates and values changed (or not changed) since the 1930s?

To ensure adequate feedback for students (and to ensure that students begin their essays early in the term), the essay will be written in three stages:

- 1) A short topic statement (**Due Sept. 29**), usually not more than a page, should outline your topic and provide a preliminary list of sources. This is an important opportunity to fine-tune both your topic and your sources.
- 2) Essay draft (**Due Nov. 7**). This should be a complete draft, with full documentation. You will receive comments and suggestions for improvement, and a preliminary grade. In a few cases, this draft will suffice or require only small changes; in most cases, a percentage of the grade will be held back pending completion of 3) below.
- 3) Final essay draft (**Due Dec. 5**). This draft will incorporate suggestions made on the first draft, and receive a final grade.

III.ii Final Exam

The final exam will test your knowledge of lectures and course readings. The emphasis will be less on core "facts" than on important problems and issues. The exam will include both short and long (essay) questions, and students will be given substantial choice in the questions they answer. We will discuss the exam in more detail later in the term.

IV. Grading

Each assignment will be graded out of 100. These grades will be weighted according to the following in reaching a final grade.

Essay topic statement.	10
Essay (first and second drafts).	50
Final examination	40

Total	100

V. Lecture Schedule

The following schedule provides an overview of the course. The course is divided into five sections. Under each section, I've listed lecture topics, although we may devote more or less attention to some areas as the semester moves along. My lectures do not depend on a strict schedule, so students should feel free to ask questions or interrupt for further explanation or exploration of areas of interest. Readings accompany most topics.

1. Background

We begin by sketching some of the unique characteristics and dilemmas of the modern American experience, and setting the stage for our understanding of 1917-1940 by tracing some major issues and themes in the preceding decades -- up through and including the experience of World War I. Note: There are no readings attached to these background lectures. Use this time to get ahead on your readings (see topics listed below) or get a start on your essay.

Understanding the Modern American Political Economy, 1870-1910

The Social Fabric: Workers and Farmers, Race and Immigration

Progressivism: Political and Social Reform before World War I

Patterns in American Foreign Policy, 1890-1920

The Homefront: Politics, Culture, and Society at War

1919: The End of the War

2. The "Roaring" Twenties

Popular perceptions of 1920s (automobiles, flappers, bathtub gin) capture little of the turmoil and uncertainty of the "New Era." In reality, the 1920s "roared" for relatively few Americans. Sporadic prosperity was accompanied by economic uncertainty and inequity. The economy teetered on the edge of collapse. And the new culture of consumption raised expectations as it raised living standards, creating new pressures in the lives of women and men.

New Era Political Economy

Reading: Chapter 2: Documents 1-4; Hawley essay

New Era Foreign Policy

Reading: Chapter 8

New Era Labor Relations

Reading: Chapter 3

The Culture of Consumption

Reading: Chapter 4

Women in the New Era

Reading: Chapter 2: Documents 5-7; Ladd-Taylor essay

Race and Ethnicity in the 1920s

Reading: Chapter 6

Intellectual and Cultural Currents: The Harlem Renaissance

Readings: Chapter 5: Documents 1-2; Lewis Essay

3. The Great Depression to 1932

The first three years of the Great Depression were marked by unprecedented economic misery and political confusion. Indeed, most considered the downturn a short-term consequence of the 1929 stock market crash -- and hoped the economy would turn itself around. We look in turn at the immediate causes and consequences of the Depression, at the tentative political response of the Hoover Administration, and at the ways in which Americans both experienced and responded to the economic crisis.

The Crash

Reading: Chapter 7; Rosenof essay

The Impact of the Depression: Workers

Reading: Chapter 7: Document 4; Chapter 10: Documents 1-4

The Impact of the Depression: Farmers

Reading: Chapter 9: Documents 1-4

The Impact of the Depression: Social Unrest

Reading: Chapter 7: Documents 4-5; Rosenzweig essay

The Politics of Recovery, 1929-1932

Reading: Chapter 7: Documents 1-2, 6; Rosenof essay

4. The New Deal

By late 1932, both the three years of political failure and a rising tide of discontent underscored the urgency of a new approach to the economic crisis. The new Administration brought with it few new ideas, but did betray a willingness to experiment. While, in the end, the "New Deal" would do little to end the Depression, it would sharply change the role and responsibility of the federal government. By the end of the 1930s, politicians debated not whether or not the government should regulate the economy, but *how it* should do so.

Political Response to the Depression

Reading: Chapter 11: Documents 1-2; Colin Gordon and Sullivan essays

A Second New Deal

Reading: Chapter 11: Document 3; Chapter 9: Document 6, Saloutos essay

The Rise of Organized Labor

Reading: Chapter 12.

The Social Security Act

Reading: Chapter 11: Documents 4-5; Linda Gordon essay

The Social Limits of the New Deal

Reading: Chapter 9: Document 7; Kelley essay; Chapter 10: Milkman essay

New Deal Foreign Policies, 1933-1940

Reading: Chapter 8: Documents 3-5; Rosenberg essay

The New Deal Gets Old, The Depression Persists, 1935-1939

Opposition to the New Deal

Reading: Chapter 13

New Deal Arts and Culture

Reading: Chapter 5: Documents 3-7; MacChesney and DeHart essays

The Depression and American Society: An Overview

5. World War, Again

We conclude with a brief look at World War II. While the full international and domestic impact of the war are beyond the scope of this course, the War did end the Depression and (as had World War I) recast American politics, culture, and society around new concerns and new problems. We will focus on the coming of the war (an almost inevitable culmination of the international disarray of the 1930s), and the way in which the war effort displaced the "politics of recovery" with the "politics of growth."

The Coming of the War, 1938-1941

Lessons of the 1920s and 1930s: The War Experience, 1941-1945

Reading: Chapters 14-15.