HIST3620: The Great Depression and the New Deal
Professor Robert Forrant

Class: Tu/Th 5:00 – 6:15PM
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Objectives: The aim of this course is to introduce students to the newest scholarship on the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the coming of the Second World War. What caused the Great Depression? Did the New Deal reduce unemployment and create new, private sector jobs? Did it solve the nation’s farm crisis? How did the New Deal redefine the federal government’s role in the economy? Did Roosevelt overreach with his effort to ‘pack’ the Supreme Court? What does Roosevelt’s Internment of the Japanese during the war do to his legacy? How did efforts to end segregation in war plants and the federal government plant the seeds for the Civil Rights movement? Is ‘Rosie the Riveter’ the precursor to the Women’s Movement that emerged in the late 1950s?

Students will: Read several books and journal articles and be expected to explain the author’s key historical points in oral and written form; gain experience working with primary sources like letters, maps, presidential speeches, and period photographs; identify and understand the major changes in the United States as its people and institutions responded to the events of the Great Depression, New Deal, and Second World War; and, demonstrate improvement in their written work.

Evaluation is based on: attendance and class participation, 25%; exam, 25%; short writing assignments, 25%; final essay, 25%. Work must be turned in on time!

Accommodations: UMass Lowell is committed to serving all students without regard to disability status or religion, and in accordance with regulations and policy. Students may request accommodations based on disability or religion. Students are not required to provide specific information to their faculty members about the reasons for their requests. Please note that not all requests for accommodation can be granted. The law allows the University to consider input regarding the technical / content requirements for courses in making its determination. Accommodation requests for medical reasons should be directed to Disability Services, disability@uml.edu.

Important Semester Dates:
Feb. 8: Arc of Justice writing assignment due. Question distributed on Feb 1.
March 27: Southern Tenant Farmers Union writing assignment due. Assignment distributed on March 20.
April 19: New Deal poster project due. Assignment distributed on April 10.
April 19: Final Exam essay questions distributed.
May 9: Final Essay due no later than 3:00pm.
Reading: Please bring readings to class!
Susan Ware, Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal, Harvard University Press, 1987
Eric Rauchway, The Great Depression and the New Deal, Oxford University Press.
Jefferson Cowie & Nick Salvatore, “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History,” ILWCH, Fall 2008. (Handout)
The Brookings Institute, “What Caused the Depression,” 1934. (Handout)

Introduction
This course examines one of the most turbulent periods of modern American history: the era of the great economic boom and cultural revolution of the 1920s; of the Great Depression and the New Deal; and of World War II. A period that many historians see as a “watershed” in global history, this course critically examines the growth of a consumer economy in the 1920s, the causes of the Depression, and how the New Deal response affected the lives of ordinary Americans. We take a close look at the ‘Great Migration’ of African Americans out of the South and how it affected race relations and the impact of the Great Depression and the New Deal on women. Finally, we consider how the country shook off its deep-seated isolationism and emerged at the end of the Second World War as the world’s hegemonic superpower. How did this happen?

In the late 1920s, the Boston Stock Exchange, drawn into the whirlpool of panic selling that beset the New York Stock Exchange, lost over 25 percent of its value in two days of frenzied trading. The BSE had helped raise the capital that had funded many of the Commonwealth's factories, railroads, and businesses. The stock market continued its slide, and by its lowest point in July of 1932, the market had lost nearly 90 percent of its value. On October 29, 1929, the newspapers had no idea of the magnitude of the catastrophe that was about to unfold. In Worcester, the Telegram and Gazette ran a headline, “Bankers Fail to Check Tumbling Stock Prices,” followed by a reassuring story that Wall Street was “Placing House in Order.” The larger headline, however, was for a banquet given for presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt in Springfield.

In MA, the lack of capital investment hit already struggling cities like Lowell, Lawrence, and Worcester hard. While ruined investors struggled, the suffering was most acute among textile, shoe, and garment workers. Unions lacked any bargaining power. The head of the textile union at the time said: “Lowell, Lawrence, New Bedford, Maynard and Fall River . . . and most of the mill towns are sad places.” Many workers, he added, had been “jobless for months, some for years, and large numbers of those who
have jobs work only one or two days a week, earning on average less than $10 a week.” In 1934, unemployment in MA reached 25 percent. Some men became ‘tramps’, moving from one town to another looking for any work or charity they could find. The lucky few who had access to vacant lots planted vegetables to stave off hunger. One Lowell mill worker recalled, “Faced with starvation, we began to eat anything that was consumable. During the summer, dandelion greens were on our diet. During the winter, we ate hard bread . . . . Everywhere people starved, raiding garbage to stay alive.” Malnourishment brought an increase in tuberculosis, rickets, and anemia.

An analysis of what the U.S. was like after the Wall Street Crash is important. What did Roosevelt inherit in March 1933? Economic statistics are one part of the historical record. Gross National Product—the total value of goods and services produced in the national economy—looked like this: 1928, $100B; 1933, $55B; 1939, $85B. The total value of consumer goods purchased was: $80B in 1928, $45B in 1933, and $65B in 1939. Private investment—the stuff of job creation—reached $15B in 1928, fell to $2B in 1933, and advanced to $10B in 1939. How about the unemployed? Their numbers stood at 2.6M in 1929, spiked to 15M in 1933, fell back to 11M in 1935, and 8M in 1937 before climbing to 10.5M in 1938. On the eve of the Second World War, some 8M people remained out of work.


From the Wall Street meltdown in October 1929 to the presidential election in November 1932, many came to believe that Republican President Hoover and Congress were doing little to fix the broken economy. ‘Too little, too late’ was a frequent label pinned to Hoover. Some who had been badly affected by the Depression had labeled their cardboard box homes ‘Hoovervilles’. The free food handouts they got were nicknamed ‘Hoover Stew’. Roosevelt experimented with ways to get people back to work that expanded the federal role in the market economy. He ‘made work’ that put money in people’s pockets, and stabilized the financial system. Those at the bottom of society—dispossessed small farmers, homeless families, folks traveling the country in a manic
search for work—had little faith in Hoover; if nothing else Roosevelt gave them hope in the American system of government.

Week 1: Introduction
January 23: Setting the Stage
January 25: Turmoil at the End of the First World War

Week 2: The ‘Roaring’ 1920s and the ‘Culture War’
January 30: Race, Riot and the KKK
February 1: Booze, Monkeys, and Women’s Vote

Week 3: The 1920s, Culture Wars, and the Long Decline
February 6: Eager Consumers and An Over-Heated Economy
February 8: *Arc of Justice* discussion and essay due.
*Arc of Justice*, finish.

Week 4: The Crash: Hunger Walks the Countryside
February 13: Hooveritis! What Went Wrong?
February 15: Global Meltdown
Exam review questions distributed.
Rauchway, *The Great Depression*, ch. 3.
Hoover, 1928 Inauguration Speech (handout).
The Brookings Institute, “What Caused the Depression?” (Handout)

Week 5: Exam
February 20 – Monday schedule, no class.
February 22 – Exam in class.
**Week 6: Down and Out**

“In Lowell I saw shabby men leaning against walls and lamp-posts and standing on street corners singly or in twos or threes; pathetic, silent, middle-aged men in torn, frayed overcoats or even without overcoats, broken shoes on their feet, slumped in postures of hopeless discontent, their faces sunken and their eyes shifty and bewildered.... (In Lawrence) I happened to arrive before daybreak on a Monday morning and, walking about, saw hundreds of shabby, silent, hollow-eyed men and women, native and foreign born, going toward the immense, dark mills. I discovered later that very few of them were going to work; most were seeking work....”


Feb 27: The Bonus Army
March 1: The 1932 Election
Rauchway, ch. 4.
Letters to the White House, Handout.

Lowell store going out of business (Jack Delano, photographer, Jan. 1941). The Great Depression had come early: *40% of the city's population was on relief*.

**Week 7: FDR’s First 100 Days – Still The Best 100 Days!**

“The money-changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization. We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths. The measure of the restoration lies in the extent to which we apply social values more noble than mere monetary profit. Happiness lies not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in
the thrill of creative effort. The joy and moral stimulation of work no longer must be forgotten in the mad chase of evanescent profits. These dark days will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow men.”

— President Franklin D. Roosevelt Inaugural Address, March 4, 1933

March 6: Nothing to Fear But…
March 8: Making Change
FDR Inauguration speech, 1933, handout.
Rauchway, *The Great Depression and New Deal*, ch. 5.

**Week 8: Workers on the Move**
March 20: Women Workers Win! We will discuss Frank.
March 22: No class, Eric Foner lecture.
Frank, *Women Strikers Occupy Chain Stores*, all.

![Workers employed by FW Woolworth chain start a sit-down strike.](image)

**Week 9: African Americans in the Great Depression**
March 27: ‘No Strangers to Hardship’
March 29: ‘Still Last Hired & First Fired’
Greenberg, *To Ask for an Equal Chance*, chs. 1 – 2 and Documents, p. 124 – 139.

In mid-July of 1934 in Tyronza, Arkansas, one of the most important unions in U.S. history was formed by black and white tenant farmers: the **Southern Tenant Farmers Union** (STFU) or Sharecroppers Union. Learn about the union at this **Encyclopedia of Arkansas** website: [http://bit.ly/A1sWP1](http://bit.ly/A1sWP1) and from BlackPast.org: [http://bit.ly/NumPVO](http://bit.ly/NumPVO)
Women read the *Sharecroppers' Voice* during an outdoor Southern Tenant Farmers' Union meeting. Parkin, Arkansas (1937).

**Week 10: African Americans, Women, and the Great Depression**
April 3: An Equal Chance?
April 5: Women and Politics

**Week 11: Women and the New Deal: Working Toward Gender Equality…?**
April 10: New Deal Reform and Women
April 12: Women and Social Welfare
Ware, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*, chs. 2 – 5.

**Week 12: The New Deal as Culture**
April 17: Documenting the New Deal
April 19: New Deal poster project due (assignment distributed in Week 10).
**Note:** Final essay questions distributed on April 19.

**Week 13: FDR, War, and Internment**
April 24: Breaking the Chains of Isolationism
April 26: Bowing to Xenophobia

**Week 14: The Uses and Abuses of New Deal History**
May 1 Discussion and Review: Cowie and Salvatore, “The Long Exception:” (handout)
https://bostonreview.net/politics/lawrence-b-glickman-forgotten-men-the-long-road-from-fdr-to-trump
Rauchway, *The Great Depression and New Deal*, ch. 7 and Conclusion.
Young boys waiting in kitchen of city mission for soup, which is given out nightly. Dubuque, Iowa. April 1940. Photographer: John Vachon.

Final Essay due May 9, 2018 no later than 3:00pm.

RESOURCES

Posters for the People: A comprehensive record of posters created under the New Deal's Federal Art Project. More than doubling the number of posters thought to exist, this online resource brings many posters to light that have not been seen by the public in more than 70 years. http://www.postersforthepeople.com

New Deal Programs: Selected Library of Congress Resources was created to serve as a starting point for research using Library of Congress collections of New Deal program materials. While this guide is by no means comprehensive, it provides an overview of special collections held by the Library of Congress and links to digitized materials and selected resources relating to New Deal programs in Library of Congress divisions. The guide also links to major collections of New Deal program materials held at other institutions. http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/newdeal/

American Memory, LOC: This site features more than 160,000 images taken by government photographers with the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and the Office of War Information (OWI) during the New Deal and World War II eras. These images document the ravages of the Great Depression on farmers, scenes of everyday life in small towns and cities, and, in later years, mobilization campaigns for World War II. This site includes approximately 1,600 color photographs and selections from two extremely popular collections: “’Migrant Mother’ Photographs” and “Photographs of Signs Enforcing Racial Discrimination.” The site also provides a bibliography, a background essay of about 500 words, seven short biographical sketches of FSA-OWI photographers,
The Frances Perkins Center honors the legacy of Frances Perkins by sharing her commitment to the principle that “government should provide all its people with the best possible life” and by preserving the place that shaped her character. Frances Perkins, FDR’s Secretary of Labor and the first woman to serve as a cabinet secretary, was the principal architect of the New Deal, credited with formulating policies to shore up the national economy following the nation’s most serious economic crisis and helping to create the modern middle class. She was in every respect a self-made woman who rose from humble New England origins to become America’s leading advocate for industrial safety and workers’ rights. http://francesperkinscenter.org

Photogrammar is a web-based platform for organizing, searching, and visualizing the 170,000 photographs from 1935 to 1945 created by the United States Farm Security Administration and Office of War Information (FSA-OWI). After a series of setbacks in the courts that repealed many of the First New Deal’s programs, FDR pursued a new set of initiatives including the Resettlement Administration in 1935. It was charged with aiding the poorest third of farmers displaced by the depression and particularly focused on resettlement on viable lands and providing low-interest loans. Directed by Rexford Tugwell, a Columbia University economist, the RA came under immediate scrutiny. In order to build support for and justify government programs, the Historical Section set out to document America, often at her most vulnerable, and the successful administration of relief service. The Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information produced some of the most iconic images of the Great Depression and World War II and included photographers such as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Arthur Rothstein who shaped the visual culture of the era both in its moment and in American memory. Unit photographers were sent across the country. The negatives were sent to Washington, DC. The growing collection came to be known as “The File.” With the United State’s entry into WWII, the unit moved into the Office of War Information and the collection became known as the FSA-OWI File. http://photogrammar.yale.edu

The Living New Deal, an interactive website, the Living New Deal has its roots in a book project by Dr. Gray Brechin on the Works Progress Administration in California. It outgrew the original intent as the vast extent of New Deal public works projects became clear. In 2005, the project became a team effort to inventory, map, and interpret how the New Deal radically modernized California. After two years as a strictly volunteer operation, the California Living New Deal Project was officially launched in 2007 at the University of California, Berkeley. It contains links to an array of local, state, and national websites on the New Deal and is possibly the single best site to get an overview of the state of the research on the New Deal. It is a remarkable resource. https://livingnewdeal.org/what-was-the-new-deal/

American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936–1940
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro/wpahome.html
This site features approximately 2,900 life histories from 1936–1940 written by the staff
of the Folklore Project of the Federal Writers’ Project for the U.S. Works Progress (later Work Projects) Administration (WPA). Documents represent the work of more than 300 writers from 24 states. The histories, in the form of drafts and revisions, vary from narrative to dialogue, report, or case history. A typical history describes an informant’s family, education, income, occupation, political views, religion and mores, medical needs, diet, and other observations on society and culture. Interviewers often substituted pseudonyms for names of individuals and places. Visitors can select a particular U.S. state or search the archive by keyword. Life histories are presented in facsimiles of original interview documents and as searchable text.

**Our Documents:** National Archives and Records Administration, National History Day, and USA Freedom Corps: Website is an online repository of 100 milestone primary documents in American history. There is a full-page scan and transcription of each document. In addition to the chronological list of 100 documents, the site includes a “People’s Vote” top-ten list. Of the 100 documents, Americans voted the Declaration of Independence number one, while the 1935 Social Security Act came in tenth. The site offers resource tools for educators and librarians on how to integrate the milestone documents into their classrooms. http://www.ourdocuments.gov/

**FDR Cartoon Archive:** A continuing project of high school history and science classes, this site presents thousands of political cartoons concerning the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Selected from the collection at the Hyde Park Presidential Library of Basil O’Conner—Roosevelt’s New York City law partner—the materials are arranged into eight subject categories and often include brief background essays and questions designed to prompt further inquiries. Periods currently emphasized include 1932, “The Road to Pennsylvania Avenue”; 1937, “The Supreme Court”; and 1943, “The War Years.” http://www.nisk.k12.ny.us/fdr/index.html

**Franklin Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum** features special immersive audio-visual theaters, and rarely seen artifacts of the Roosevelt era.

https://fdrlibrary.org/home