America Between The Wars:
“Good Times and Hard Times”

Spring 2014  Alex Bloom
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This course is a survey of American history from the First World War to the Second. While the period is bracketed by these two international events, the time in between is marked by decades of strong domestic contrast. The 1920s are remembered as a time of high living and general prosperity, the 1930s as a period of economic depression and personal hardship.

We will investigate these decades from a variety of perspectives—political, social, diplomatic, cultural, and personal. We will look at how people lived, what they thought about their society, and how events influenced individual lives.

Historical periods rarely divide themselves so neatly as do the 1920s and 1930s. Some of the reading reflects this balance, such as the two works of literature, one from each decade. But we will follow the experiences of one particular population, urban workers in Chicago, over the course of these years. Finally, we will look at this period through the use of a number of films—feature films from the period, as well as contemporary documentaries.

Reading
Michael Parrish, Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression,
Sherwood Anderson, Winesberg, Ohio
Meridel LeSueur, Salute to Spring

In addition, there are occasional assigned reading assignments from original documents available online. These are identified with (*ID*) under the weekly reading assignments and listed, with their links, after the syllabus.

Course Outline

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Online Document Readings & Videos

**January 27**
1. Calvin Coolidge, “The Business of America is Business”
   http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4991/
   http://www.materialreligion.org/documents/july97doc.html

**February 3**
1. Dorothy Dunbar Brumley, “Feminist—New Style”
   http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/mmh/clash/NewWoman/Documents/newstyle.htm
   http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/mmh/clash/NewWoman/Documents/newfreedom.htm
3. Sheila Kaye-Smith, “The New Woman”
   http://ehistory.osu.edu/osu/mmh/clash/NewWoman/Documents/newwomen.htm

**February 20**

**February 17**
1. Claude McKay, “If We Must Die”
   http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5130
   http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5124
3. Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”
   http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoem.do?poemId=1553

**February 24**
1. Herbert Hoover Predicts Prosperity
   http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5063/
2. The Bonus Army
   http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pfbonusarmy.htm

**March 17**
1. The CCC: “It’s a Great Life”
   http://newdeal.feri.org/ccc/ccc009.htm

**April 7**
1. Father Coughlin
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzLMRAz5G_4
2. Huey Long
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hphgHi6FD8k
3. The Townsend Plan
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B10O4qUR7tY

**April 28**
1. Letters from The Spanish Civil War
   http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/scw/letters.htm
Interview about Depression Life

You should ask questions about issues in the following areas, but do not feel that it is necessary to go through the list question by question. Help the subject to begin talking and then see how his or her answers deal with the questions below. It is much better to let personal responses flow. If an area is missed, you can go back and ask about it at an appropriate time.

1. What experiences do you recall from the 1930s?
   What kind of work did you or your parents do?
   Was it affected by the depression?

2. Do you remember Roosevelt?
   What were your impressions of him?
   Your parents' impressions?
   Your friends' impressions?
   What are your impressions now?

3. Did your family situation change as a result of the Depression?
   What personal impact did this have on you?
   Your parents? Your siblings? Your children?


5. Was anyone in your family involved in labor activities?
   radical politics?
   other political work?
   social services?

6. Did you or anyone in your family work for or receive aid from a New Deal agency?

7. How do you think sex roles were affected by the Depression?
   Compare the 30s, the 50s, and now.

8. Were there good things which you think came out of the Depression?


Add questions of your own, based on the person, his or her occupation, information you know from personal experience, residence, and events then or since that seem important.
When you have discussed these, integrate the answers, the subject’s personal history, and your observations into a one-to-two page paper that both describes the individual and offers some of your insight into the impact of the depression on people's lives.

This is due, in class, on February 24 and will serve as the basis for several discussions on the impact of the Depression and life during the 1930s.

**Grading**

Your grade will be computed on the basis of the following. The midterm will count for 40% of your final grade, the final 50%. The combined discussion/attendance grade, including your submissions on the primary documents we will read from the web, will count for 10%. In addition, there will be the optional essay you can write, which will reduce the weight of your midterm and final.

*WCAS Grading System:*

The undergraduate grading system consists of twelve categories: A (4.00), A- (3.67), excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), B- (2.67), good; C+ (2.33), C (2.00), C- (1.67), satisfactory; D+ (1.33), D (1.00), D- (.67), passing but unsatisfactory; F (.00), failure; I (.00), incomplete; F (.00), course dropped without notifying office; W (.00), official withdrawal from course. The graduate grading system is A (4.00), A- (3.67), Excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), good; B- (2.67) and C (2.00), passing but not for degree credit; F (.00), failure.

Grade Reports. All students are required to log into the web through Agora to access their semester grades. Students must utilize their BC username and password to log on. If your username or password is not known, the Student Learning and Support Center in the O’Neill Library Computer Center will issue a new one. The SLSC requires a valid picture ID (a BC ID, driver’s license or passport) to obtain your password.

**Classroom Laptop Use**

Students may use a laptop computer in regular classes provided it is used only for class-related work and not used to check e-mail, surf the web, or engage in other out-of-class activities during class time. The same holds true for smart phones, notebooks, and other devices, including sending text messages during class. Students violating this rule will be barred from bringing a laptop or other electronic device to class. If violations of this occur more than twice in this class, all laptops and electronic devices will be barred from the class entirely. Students may use laptop computers during examinations only with the permission of the instructor.
Boston College Mission Statement

Strengthened by more than a century and a half of dedication to academic excellence, Boston College commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation’s finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition. As a Catholic and Jesuit university, it is rooted in a world view that encounters God in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together. In this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious traditions and value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.

Important WCAS Policies
http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/schools/advstudies/guide/academicinteg.html

Written Work
Graduate and undergraduate students are expected to prepare professional, polished written work. Written materials must be typed in the format required by your instructor. Strive for a thorough, yet concise style. Cite literature appropriately, using APA, MLA, CLA format per instructors decision. Develop your thoughts fully, clearly, logically and specifically. Proofread all materials to ensure the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You are encouraged to make use of campus resources for refining writing skills as needed [http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring.html].

Scholarship and Academic Integrity
It is expected that students will produce original work and cite references appropriately. Failure to reference properly is plagiarism. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, cheating on examinations or assignments, and submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without seeking permission of all instructors concerned. Scholastic misconduct may also involve, but is not necessarily limited to, acts that violate the rights of other students, such as depriving another student of course materials or interfering with another student’s work.

Disability Statement
Classroom accommodations will be provided for qualified students with documented disabilities. Students are invited to contact the Connors Family Learning Center office about accommodations for this course. Telephone appointments are available to students as needed. Appointments can be made by calling 617-552-8903. You may also make an appointment in person. For further information, you can locate the disability resources on the web at:
http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html.