

LIBA 497: Life in the Great Depression

Instructor: Dr. Denise Lynn

Class Times:

Office: LA 3017, 465-1095

Office Hours:

Email: dmlynn1@usi.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course looks at American social and cultural life during the economic and political upheaval of the 1930s. While the American economy suffered its most severe collapse between 1929 and 1931 leading to a period referred to as the Great Depression; American social and cultural expression flourished. New forms of art emerged, fiction writers used socialist realism to provide answers to capitalism's woes, musicians experimented with new styles and re-discovered older ones, and films and consumer culture flourished at a time when the American people needed a distraction from everyday life. At the same time, however, more Americans finished high school, children began to leave home at an earlier age to fend for themselves, and radical groups on both the Left and the Right provided "plans" to save the American economy. The New Deal, the Roosevelt Administration's attempt to rescue the economy, changed the face of American politics forever. For the first time the federal government took a larger role in people's lives. Students will explore how people lived during times of economic difficulty, how they entertained themselves, what solutions radicals created to confront the nation's problems, and how citizens re-envisioned their relationship with the federal government. This course fulfills the "Synthesis" requirement of the University Core Curriculum.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

After successfully completing this course, you should be able to do the following:

1. Describe the significant people, places, and events shaping the U.S. during the Great Depression.
2. Analyze the response of the federal government to the needs of the American people.
3. Understand the place of race, gender, class, and religion in social relationships.
4. Evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and trends in United States foreign relations.
5. Explore how Americans understood the role of the federal government.
6. Analyze how the Great Depression transformed American culture, behaviors, and attitudes.
7. Recognize and critically analyze primary and secondary sources.
8. Write effectively and with appropriate analysis about the Great Depression.
9. Use evidence to support an argument in critical writing.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Erksine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*

Neil Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corp and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*

Charles Shinkdo, *Dust Bowl Migrants in the American Imagination*. University Press of Kansas, 1997.

Tess Slesinger, *The Unpossessed: A Novel of the Thirties*

William Young and Nancy Young, *Music of the Great Depression*, Greenwood Press, 2005.

Richard Wright, *Native Son*

Grade Distribution

A	90 -100
B+	86 - 89
B	80-85
C+	76 -79
C	70-75
D	60-69
F	Below 60

Course Requirements

- 20% Participation and Attendance
- 15% Concept Maps
- 10% 2 page Response Paper on *Native Son* , by John Steinbeck
- 10% 2 page Response Paper on *The Unpossessed*
- 10% 2 page Response Paper on *Tobacco Road*
- 10% 2 page Response Paper on book and movie *Gone With the Wind*
- 25% Service Learning Project
 - 15% 5-7 page paper
 - 10% Presentation of Research

Participation and Attendance:

The class will be conducted as a seminar which requires the full and active participation of each student. In order to get full credit for this grade you must have regular attendance, participate in class discussion, and demonstrate that you are doing class readings. Although the class rules state that after three absences your FINAL grade will be deducted, each absence does count against you in the final participation and attendance grade. Perfect attendance should be rewarded!

Concept Maps (see attached):

The goal of the concept map is to get you to read the articles and outline the author's argument and evidence used to prove the argument. This will help you understand the historiography of a particular topic/area of study. The following is what is expected of you and how the map will be graded.

Argument: Often an article may have one or more argument or it may be difficult to find the thesis; in these cases write down the more prominent argument. **Evidence:** You must also find three pieces of evidence the author provides to back up his/her thesis. The author may point out what evidence strengthens his/her argument, or it may be implied. Find what you think backs up the argument.

Conclusions and Questions: Finally, what conclusions does the author draw from his/her evidence?

Does the author offer any solutions for studying history based on his/her research? Does the author's research substantially modify prior research in his/her field? List any questions you may have about the article – is there other evidence that might undermine the author's argument? Is he/she excluding other factors of consideration? Was there anything that did not make sense to you? Does this research change your understanding of an area of history?

Response Papers:

How to read a text for your response paper

A response paper is exactly what it sounds like – you have to respond to whatever you have read or seen. For example, if you are asked to write a response paper on John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, you need to interrogate the text based on your understanding of the time period in which it was written. So, for example, John Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* about the Joad family, tenant farmers forced to leave the land and move west in search of work. However, Steinbeck touched on a number of important themes relevant to life during the Great Depression including the role of the federal government in relief under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, suspicion of the working class, the failure of associationalism as advocated by Herbert Hoover, and the importance of labor organizing. Although Sinclair was a sympathetic Leftist and his novel was accused of being communist propaganda, the film based on the novel became a major Hollywood production, and won an academy award. Why did some people find Steinbeck's depiction of working people threatening? Why would Steinbeck be dismissed as a communist for writing about the working class? Each of these questions relate to the culture and time period in which Steinbeck wrote. While you are reading the assigned text, or watching the assigned film, take careful notes on the important cultural, political, and social themes.

Formulating a thesis and body paragraphs

You must formulate a thesis in "response" to the themes you recorded while reading the book or watching the film. A thesis is essentially an argument you are making that can be proven by evidence. So for example, I might argue that John Steinbeck's novel appeared threatening to lawmakers and conservatives because of their growing concern that the large number of working class and unemployed people would rise up and challenge an already weakened capitalist structure. Your thesis should be clear, concise, and obvious to the reader – it is always best to put it in your introduction. Depending on the length of the paper required you should spend at least two to three paragraphs on examining your evidence. Your evidence should clearly back up your thesis. For example, in my paper on *The Grapes of Wrath*, I will offer as evidence one paragraph on the Joad family's eviction from their land, another paragraph on their trek to California and their less than friendly welcome, and another paragraph on the limits of the government camp and the difficulty in securing permanent employment. Each paragraph should be focused, clear cut, and not too lengthy (no less than three sentences and definitely no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page). You may use quotes but each quote must be followed by some analysis and a citation.

Conclusion

The best formula for a solid conclusion is to restate your thesis (not verbatim) and summarize your evidence.

Service Learning Project:

You will have a few options to choose from for your Service Learning Project. The project will focus on an aspect of local Evansville history. You and the others in your group will research a particular topic, compile an individual research paper, and present your findings to the class. The service component is that this research can be used to organize the files and papers of local attractions. For example, the Oak Hill Cemetary is interested in compiling research on its brick wall that was supposedly completed by the Works Progress Administration. There are many places that contain a plethora of sources on local history including the USI archives and Willard Library. Based on your research you will write a 5-7 page

paper on your topic. The paper will be graded on organization, thesis, quality of research, and proper grammar usage. The paper is worth 15%. Finally you will present your research to your classmates. The presentation should be 5-10 minutes in length and include some kind of visual. The presentation is worth 10% of your grade.

COURSE RULES

- Please turn off cell phones during class, No text messaging.
- Laptops are not allowed in class.
- Make-up exams and quizzes are not allowed without a written excuse for absence. ONLY when you have presented your written excuse will you be allowed to make-up an exam and it must be within ONE WEEK of the original exam date.
- **Attendance is required** -- after three absences students will lose one letter grade for each class missed (keep in mind that each absence works against you – meaning that even if you miss one class your participation grade will go down).
- Do not be late. Excessive tardiness (more than three days) will be considered an absence.
- If you have a written excuse for an absence it must be presented to your instructor no later than one week after the absence.
- Disruptive behavior in class can result in loss of letter grade or expulsion from the course (disruptive behavior includes lateness, talking in class, rude or offensive language, or leaving in the middle of class).
- All assignments must be turned in on the day it is due; if an assignment is late you will lose one letter grade everyday it is late. In the event of an emergency, students can request an extension. If you require an extension (other than emergencies) it must be requested 24 hours in advance.
- **Do not use Wikipedia or any other internet sources for your papers.** Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Anything that is plagiarized will receive an automatic F and possible expulsion from course or disciplinary action through the school. USI considers academic dishonesty (defined by the Dean of Students as cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference with another student's work, or facilitating academic dishonesty) to be a serious misconduct and subject to disciplinary measures up to and including expulsion from the university. These infractions and the penalties are explained further at the Dean of Students' website: http://www.usi.edu/stl/section_changes.asp. It is your responsibility to read this site and comply with its requirements.
- If you complete the procedure for a Withdrawal from this class beginning with the first day of the term through the ninth week of the term (INSERT DATE) you will receive a 'W' for the course. If you complete the procedure for a Withdrawal during the tenth week of class through the last day of classes before the final exam (INSERT DATE) you will receive the grade 'W' if you are passing with a D or above at the time you drop the course. However, if you are failing at the time you drop the course, you will receive a grade of 'F.' **It is University policy that students who withdraw from a class after INSERT DATE and have a failing grade in the class at time of withdrawal must receive an F, not a W.**
- AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT COMPLIANCE: If you have a disability, you are encouraged to register for disability support services in the Counseling Center [Room 1051, Orr Center, (812) 464-1867]. If you require an accommodation, please advise the instructor by the end of the first week of class. You may be required to provide written documentation to support these accommodations. The instructor will work with you to provide reasonable

accommodations to ensure that you have a fair opportunity to perform and participate in class.