HIST 490: American Thought & Culture, 1920s & 1930s
UNLV, Summer III, 2004
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Course Overview
While this course examines political, economic, and social developments in America during the 1920s and 1930s, the primary emphasis is on the cultural/intellectual life of the period. The course begins with the intellectual climate in the post-World War One years and closes with the prevailing intellectual currents in the nation at the dawning of World War Two. The course also provides a close comparative analysis of cultural/intellectual developments in the 1920s and 1930s. The decade of the 1920s is often stereotyped as the "Jazz Age," "Roaring Twenties," or the "Era of the Lost Generation"; but the 1920s was a complex decade marked by cultural conflict between various ethnic, religious, and regional groups. These conflicts were manifested in the massive growth of the Ku Klux Klan during the first half of the decade, the passage of restrictive immigration legislation, and by the prohibition and eugenics movements. By closely examining various cultural developments in the twenties we are able to move beyond the simple, colorful stereotypes to a more complex understanding of that era.

The 1930s, the "depression decade," was certainly a marked departure from the 1920s. The nation plummeted into the worst economic depression in its history and the social and cultural consequences were immense. One of the most interesting developments is the changing relationship between intellectuals and the broader public in those lean years. Many American writers and thinkers grew cynical and weary of the general public during the 1920s, but during the Great Depression, moved by the hardship they witnessed, the nation's intellectual elite began to empathize with and champion the struggles of ordinary Americans. If the 1920s was marked by cultural division and by the disillusionment of intellectuals with the broader public, the thirties were marked by economic despair and by the discovery (or better, rediscovery) of the virtuous "common man" (and woman) by the nation’s intellectuals.

The course also emphasizes the intellectual shift from moral relativism to moral absolutism during this inter-war period. In the wake of World War One, not to mention Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity postulated in 1915, absolute truths were, for the intellectual classes, hard to find, though movements such as religious fundamentalism had broad appeal for other Americans. But with the rise of German, Spanish, and Italian fascism and of Japanese aggression in the 1930s, not to mention the enormously influential writings of the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, intellectuals rediscovered moral absolutes and characterized World War Two as “the Good War.”

Lastly, the course examines the parallels and continuities between the 1920s and 1930s as well as the more commonly emphasized differences. The conservative Republican administrations of the 1920s offer a clear contrast with the liberalism of the Democratic dominated New Deal 1930s. But there are commonalities between the two decades too: an agricultural depression spanned both decades; the multitudinous cultural conflicts of the 1920s did not dissipate in the 1930s; religious fundamentalism was on the rise in both decades, even if American intellectuals did not participate in the movement. The two decades were by no means more alike than different, but their differences have often been exaggerated.

Course Objectives
The period of the 1920s and 1930s is arguably the richest period in the cultural/intellectual life of the nation and for that reason alone people should have some familiarity with it. Furthermore, the parallels between the cultural debates of that era—over immigration, religion, the role of the federal government, and the meaning of Americanism—and those of today, are uncannily illuminating. An understanding of the inter-war years will enhance your understanding of the cultural, political, and economic debates of the present. The course is also designed to introduce you to some of the complexities of American intellectual thought, and in doing so to enhance your critical thinking skills.
Required Readings

**Paul Conkin,** *The New Deal.* Third Edition (1967; Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992). [Paperback 0-88295-889-5]. The New Deal is one of the most written about subjects in the field of American history. Conkin’s classic short study, now nearly four decades old, is still among the most insightful and informative books on the topic. In this sober assessment of FDR and the reform legislation of the 1930s, Conkin demonstrates both the achievements and the shortcomings of the New Deal.

**F. Scott Fitzgerald,** *The Great Gatsby.* Notes and Preface by Matthew J. Bruccoli, (1925; NY: Scribner, 1995). [Paperback, 0-684-80152-3]. Or, (NY: Collier Books, 1992). [Paperback, 0-02-019881-7]. Probably the most widely read American novel of the twentieth century, required reading for generations of high school and beginning college students, Fitzgerald’s classic reveals much about thought and culture in the 1920s. On the surface the novel is a testament to the Jazz Age; but one does not have to dig very deep to see the anxieties, frustrations, and disillusion of the post-World War One years reflected in the text.

**Colin Gordon,** ed., *Major Problems in American History, 1920-1945: Documents and Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). [Paperback 0395870747]. The best available collection of essays and documents on the period 1920-1945, Gordon’s book provides coverage of domestic and foreign policy, politics, society, culture, and economics. The format of two or three essays and several documents in each chapter will provide the basis for the essay, which will require you to restructure or augment a single chapter with your own essay and document selections.


Additional Readings (Xeroxed Packet)

Document 3: Henry Pratt Fairchild, “The Argument Against the Melting Pot” (1926)
Document 4: “Buck V Bell” (1927)

Assignments & Grading

Midterm 30%
Paper 30%
Final 30%
Attendance, Discussion 10%

Grading Scale

The +/- grading system will be used. The grading scale is as follows:

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Attendance
Attendance is expected in this class. Absence impairs one’s ability to contribute to discussions and leaves one unfamiliar with the topical coverage provided in class, consequently leading to poor performance on exams and papers and a low grade for class discussion. There are twenty four class sessions, including the midterm and final, in this short summer session, so excessive absence will certainly be conspicuous.

Discussion
This is an upper division course and you should come to each meeting prepared to discuss the assigned readings. There is a direct causal relationship between one’s ability to discuss the readings intelligently and one’s actually having read them. I may call on individuals to introduce us to the key themes of readings; please be prepared for this. 10% of your grade is based on your contributions to class discussion.

Exams
The midterm covers Part One of the course, on the 1920s. The final covers Part Two, on the 1930s. The final is not comprehensive (but may include an optional comprehensive essay). Exams are designed to gauge understanding of the material, not merely your memorization skills. Each exam consists of an essay on course readings and five triads, drawn from course lectures and readings.

Papers
Your paper must be typed, double-spaced, grammatically sound, and carefully proofed. Direct quotations, and/or paraphrasing should be cited in footnotes or endnotes, or in parenthesis. The paper should be 5-6 pages long (1,500-1,800 words). Please refer to Appendix 1: Writing Techniques. Your paper can focus on any of the chapters in Gordon, ed., *Major Problems in American History, 1920-1945*. (You will participate in a group presentation on one of the chapters). You are required to summarize and analyze the contents of the chapter and in addition analyze and summarize at least one additional scholarly article or book chapter on the same topic and at least two additional documents. I have provided a bibliography to assist you in locating additional sources for your paper. Only chapters from scholarly books (such as those listed in the bibliography) or scholarly journals (such as *The Journal of American History*, *American Historical Review*, *Pacific Historical Review*, *Journal of Southern History*, *Western Historical Quarterly*) are acceptable as additional secondary sources. Articles from these journals are all available as PDF files through databases such as J Store. Primary sources can be drawn from published anthologies or from websites.

Active Reading
It is important that you take the time to read the assigned materials carefully and actively. It is often helpful, for example, to make marginal comments in the books. If you disagree with a particular point that an author is making, then make a note to that effect in the margin. You will find it helpful to write a brief summary of each chapter as you complete it. Consider the following questions:
1) What major points is the author trying to make?
2) What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her arguments?
3) What are the author's biases, preferences, and viewpoint?
4) How does the author's coverage compare with that of other readings and class lectures?

Plagiarism
To use someone else’s ideas and/or language as if they were your own is plagiarism. To engage in such an act in a course on the history of ideas would be particularly unconscionable, as well as deeply ironic. Plagiarism has absolutely no place in an institution of higher learning. Plagiarism and any other acts of academic dishonesty—e.g. cheating on an exam—will be rewarded with an “F” for the assignment, in all probability an “F” for the course and reporting of the incident to the College Dean. For further details concerning academic dishonesty please refer to the *Student Handbook*.

Film Footage
We will view a number of documentary films along with clips from feature length films during the semester. These materials will be shown during class time and are an integral part of the course. You should be as concerned with taking good notes on the films as you are with taking good lecture notes.
Disabilities
If you have a documented disability that requires assistance, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) for coordination of your academic accommodations. The DRC is located in the Reynolds Student Services Complex, Room 137. The DRC phone number is 895-0866 or TDD 895-0652.

Religious Holidays
Students who miss a class assignment because of observance of a religious holiday shall have the opportunity to make up missed work. In order to be assured of this opportunity it is the student’s responsibility to inform me of anticipated absences during the first week of the course.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

PART ONE: THE TWENTIES

Week One
M, July 12: Course Introduction; In the Wake of War (Gordon, 1-24)
T, July 13: Stereotypes (Nash, 1-32)
W, July 14: Politics & Economics (Gordon, 25-36, 57-71)
Th, July 15: Intellectual Life, I: War, Man, Democracy, Nation (Nash, 33-77)

Week Two
T, July 20: Cultural Life, II: Consumption (Gordon, 89-115)
W, July 21: Cultural Life, III: Race & Ethnicity (Gordon, Gordon, 150-180)
Th, July 22: Chapter Reconstruction: Cultural Conflict (Xeroxed Packet)
F, July 23: The Great Gatsby (Preface & 5-64)

Week Three
M, July 26: The Great Gatsby (65-118)
T, July 27: The Great Gatsby (119-189)
W, July 28: Midterm Exam

PART TWO: THE THIRTIES

Th, July 29: Causes & Responses (Conkin, 1-53; Gordon, 182-209)
F, July 30: Framing the New Deal: 1stND, Thunder on the Left, 2ndND (Conkin, 54-106)

Week Four
M, August 2: The Intellectuals’ Response I; MP, Welfare & Politics (Conkin, 54-106)
T, August 3: New Deal Ideology, II; MP, Agriculture (Gordon, 241-271)
W, August 4: Radicalism & Rediscovering America, I; MP, Private Lives (273-301)
Th, August 5: MP, The Contested Deal (370-396)
F, August 6: No Class (Begin In Dubious Battle and work on papers)

Week Five
M, August 9: Radicalism & Rediscovering America, II; In Dubious Battle (9-90)
T, August 10: In Dubious Battle (91-213)
W, August, 11: In Dubious Battle (214-349): Paper Due Date
Th, August 12: Rediscovering Sin & War (Gordon, 398-408)
F, August 13: Final Exam
Appendix 1: Writing Techniques:

I: Theme Development (Pre-writing):
Essays should be driven by a key theme or argument. Effective theme construction is possible only after reflection on the topic.

1) Consider what you want to say before you begin; do not “make it up” as you go along.
2) Consider developing a paragraph-by-paragraph outline for the paper.
3) Think of an appropriate title. Considering titles can assist in theme construction and development.
4) Do not worry if there are loose ends in your thought processes before you begin writing. Writing the paper is part of the creative process, too.

II: Draft Writing:
Having reflected on the theme of your paper and appropriate content coverage, and having constructed a detailed outline, you should begin writing a first draft.

1) Make sure your opening paragraph clearly outlines both the scope of your paper (the general content/issues to be covered) and its central theme or argument.
2) If your essay draws on the work of other scholars, then be sure to demonstrate to the reader that you understand the themes/arguments presented in those works.
3) The bulk of your paper should present the relevant information/evidence necessary to flesh out the theme, or lend weight to the argument that you are making.
4) This presentation of evidence may include quotations from the sources. Effective quotation requires great care. To quote a few lines from a source simply because they sound good, without fully comprehending their meaning or context, is very unwise. Instead, you should quote material that provides a sure indication of the point of view, or of some key point, or integral element of the argument of the author. Avoid long block quotations whenever possible. Short quotations, interspersed into your own narrative are effective because they do not break up your narrative flow.
5) As you write the final paragraphs of your paper, make sure you have developed a strong conclusion. A concluding paragraph is most successful when it succinctly summarizes the information presented in the paper without sounding repetitious, and then closes with a strong, even memorable, sentence or two.

III: Rewriting:
Having reflected on the paper's theme and content and written a draft, you may be half way through the assigned task. Rewriting is the next vital stage.

1) Set aside your first draft for a day or two, or even an hour or two, and then come back to it. Distancing yourself from the paper will better enable you to assess its merits.
2) Read through the draft and check each of the guidelines under section II (above): Is your opening paragraph clear and effective? Have you demonstrated an understanding of the sources you draw on? Have you presented sufficient evidence/information to support your argument/develop your theme? Does the quoted material serve its proper purpose, i.e., does it illustrate key points/arguments/points of view? Does the paper's conclusion still seem convincing to you?
3) If you find any shortcomings in the draft then correct them. This redrafting process may include a thorough rewriting of the whole paper, or of a few sections, or the re-ordering of certain paragraphs. You may find that you need to reconsider your title. You are correcting a draft, so be hard on yourself; find every weakness you can. Consider all the possible criticisms of your paper and how you can deflate them.
4) Also check the draft carefully for grammatical shortcomings. Use the spell check function on the computer, but remember that computerized spell checkers are unreliable; you should also proofread a printout of your paper. Are your tenses consistent? Is your sentence construction effective, i.e. do your sentences read smoothly and make perfect sense? Have you carefully divided material into paragraphs? Do you have strong transitional sentences to lead the reader from one paragraph to the next?
5) Now you should have a complete second draft of your paper in front of you. You could submit the second draft of you paper or go through the above process again. Generally, the more drafts a paper goes through, the more effective it becomes.
Appendix 2: Selected Bibliography

History, General, 1920-1945

Piers Brendon, The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s (2000)
Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939 (1990)
Nancy F. Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism (1987)
Robert Crudden, From Self to Society, 1919-1941 (1972)
John P. Diggins, The Rise and Fall of the American Left (1992)
Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (1942) [LC]
Isabel Leighton, ed., The Aspirin Age: 1919-1941 (1949)
Michael E. Parrish, Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941 (1992)
Virginia Scharff, Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age (1991)
Ruth Schwartz Cowan, More Work for Mother (1983)
Marguerite S. Shaffer, See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940 (2001)

**Sports History**
Charles C. Alexander, Ty Cobb (1984)
William Baker, Jesse Owens (1985)
Robert Creamer, Babe: The Legend Comes to Life (1974)
Chris Mead, Joe Louis (1986)
Randy Roberts, Jack Dempsey (1980)

**1920s: History**
Houston A. Baker, Jr., Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance (1987)
Kathleen Blee, Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s (1991)
Carl Bode, Mencken (1969)
Dorothy M. Brown, Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s (1987)
Paul Carter, Another Part of the Twenties (1977)
Paul Carter, The Twenties in America (1975)
David Chalmers, Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan (1965)
Stanley Coben, A. Mitchell Palmer (1963)
Stanley Cohen, Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America (1991)
Norman H. Clark, Deliver Us from Evil (1976)
Paula Fass, The Damned and Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s (1977)
James J. Flink, The Car Culture (1975)
Larry Gerlach, Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah (1982)
Oscar Handlin, *Al Smith and His America* (1958)
John D. Hicks, *Republican Ascendancy, 1921-1933* (1960)
Frederick J. Hoffman, *The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade* (1949) [LC]
Julian F. Jaffe, *Crusade Against Radicalism* (1972)
Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (1989)
Henry Walsh Lee, *How Dry We Were: Prohibition Revisited* (1963)
Murray B. Levin, *Political Hysteria in America* (1972)
Donald R. McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge: The Silent President* (1967)
George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (1980)
Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (1975)

1920s: History (Articles)

1920s: Literature
Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919)
Bruce Barton, *The Man Nobody Knows: A Discovery of Jesus* (1925)
Willa Cather, *A Lost Lady* (1923)
Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1934) [LC]
John Dos Passos, *Three Soldiers* (1921)
John Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925)
William Faulkner, *Sartoris* (1929)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise* (1920)
Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time* (1924)
Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)
Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929)
Langston Hughes, *Weary Blues* (1926) [P]
Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (1922)
Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (1920)
Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (1925) [E, A]
Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (1925)
Jean Toomer, *Cane* (1923)
Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (1925)

**1920s: Primary Sources**

Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (1931)
Henry Ford, *My Life and Work* (1922)
Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrill Lynd, *Middletown* (1929)
Harold Stearns, ed., *Civilization in the United States* (1922) [E]

**1920s: Movies**

*The Jazz Singer* (1927)
*Time Was 1920s* (____) [D]
*Inherit the Wind* (1960)
*Inherit the Wind* (1988); NBC TV remake
*Inherit the Wind* (1999)
*Cross of Fire* (1989); TV movie on D. C. Stephenson and the KKK

**1930s: History**

Kenneth Bindas, *All of This Belongs to the Nation: The WPA’s Federal Music Project and American Society* (1996)
Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young, 1929-1941* (1993)
Paul Conkin, *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program* (1959)
Justus D. Doenecke and John E. Wilz, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941* (1991)
Frank Freidel, *Franklin Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny* (1990)
James McGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (1956)
Jerre Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal* (1972)


James Patterson, *America’s Struggle Against Poverty* (1981)


Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (1973)

Kenneth R. Philip, *John Collier's Crusade for Indian Reform* (1977)


Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage* (1981)

Susan Ware, *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* (1985)


Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (1979)

**The New Deal & American Indians**


Lawrence W. Hauptman, *The Iroquois and the New Deal* (1981)


**1930s: Literature**

Erskine Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, 1932
John Dos Passos, *The Big Money* (1936)
William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930)
William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (1931)
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* (1934)
Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932)
Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940)
Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (1935)
John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)
John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men* (1937)
John Steinbeck, *The Long Valley* (1938)

**1930s: Primary Sources**

Grace Adams, *Workers on Relief* (1939)
James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941)
Frederick Lewis Allen, *Since Yesterday: The Nineteen-Thirties in America* (1940)
E. Wight Bakke, *Citizens Without Work* (1940)

**1930s: Literature**

Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930) [E]
Nathanael West, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933)
Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (1939)
Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940)

1930s: Movies

*A Night at the Opera* (1935) [Marx Bros.]
*City Lights* (1931) [Chaplin]
*Drams Along the Mohawk* (1939)
*Duck Soup* (1933) [Marx Bros.]
*Fury* (1936) [Lang]
*Gone With the Wind* (1939)
*I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932) [Le Roy]
*It Happened One Night* (1934) [Capra]
*Little Caesar* (1930) [Le Roy]
*Modern Times* (1936) [Chaplin]
*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) [Capra]
*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) [Capra]
*Meet John Doe* (1941) [Capra]
*Public Enemy* (1931) [Wellman]
*Stagecoach* (1939) [Ford]
*Scarface* (1932) [Hawks]
*The Informer* (1935) [Ford]
*The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) [Ford]
*The Great Dictator* (1940) [Chaplin]
*The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) [D] [Lorentz]
*The River* (1938) [D] [Lorentz]
*Tobacco Road* (1941) [Ford]
*You Only Live Once* (1937) [Lang]

1930s: Photography

Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937)
Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, *Say, Is This the USA?* (1941)

Abbreviations

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