Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. . . . 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.

-Franklin D. Roosevelt, "First Inaugural Address," 3 March 1933

This seminar is an investigation of American cultural life during the Great Depression and Second World War (1929-1945). The emphasis is on the interpretation of primary sources, particularly literature and film, as clues to the meanings at stake in the ideas, values, and signifying practices of this pivotal period in the history of the United States.

BOOKS

Most of the following books have been ordered at the UR Bookstore, and all are available at Amazon (at reduced prices). They are also are on 2-hour reserve in Rush Rhees Library.

Michael Adams, The Best War Ever
Stanley Applebaum, ed., The New York World's Fair 1939/40
Raymond Chandler, The Big Sleep
William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!
David Gelernter, 1939: The Lost World of the Fair
Bruce Lenthall, Radio's America
Lawrence and Cornelia Levine, ed., The Fireside Conversations.
Mary McCarthy, The Company She Keeps
Jeffrey Meikle, *Twentieth-Century Limited*
John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath*
Studs Terkel, *The "Good War”*
Nathanael West, *A Cool Million*
Richard Wright, *Native Son*
Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*

Shorter readings are on electronic reserve via Blackboard. Two general cultural histories of the period, Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front* and Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, are highly recommended, but not required reading.

**MOVIES**

Movies are an important part of this course, as they were of the culture of the Depression and World War II. Screenings of the course films will be held on Mondays at 7.40 in Meliora 208 as follows. Most of these movies are also readily available on DVD or from Netflix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Movie(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>10 September</td>
<td><em>Grapes of Wrath</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>17 September</td>
<td><em>Plow that Broke the Plains</em> and <em>The River</em></td>
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<td>24 September</td>
<td><em>Citizen Kane</em></td>
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<td>1 October</td>
<td><em>Christmas in July</em></td>
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<td>8 October</td>
<td><em>Gone with the Wind</em></td>
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<td>15 October</td>
<td><em>Porgy and Bess</em></td>
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<td>22 October</td>
<td><em>The Women</em></td>
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<td>29 October</td>
<td><em>Gold Diggers of 1933</em></td>
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<td>5 November</td>
<td><em>Shall We Dance?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 November</td>
<td><em>The City</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>26 November</td>
<td><em>Double Indemnity</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 December</td>
<td><em>Hail the Conquering Hero</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 December</td>
<td><em>Best Years of Our Lives</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**Class Meetings:** All students are expected to attend and actively participate in the weekly seminar discussions.

**Movie Guides:** Every week, by noon Monday of that week, one or more students will provide the rest of the class with a brief guide to the week's movie. In composing these guides, you may find useful the helpful guide to film reference works prepared by librarian Nora Dimmock: [http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=332](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=332)

**Discussion Questions:** Each week each student will prepare two questions for discussion, one on the document, the other on the movie. These questions will be sent to all members of the class via e-mail by 10 pm on the Tuesday evening before class. Preparation of these questions will be an important part of participation in the class.
**Papers:** Every student will write three papers of modest length. The first two of these papers (1500 words) will be critical essays, one on a major course document and the other on a course movie. These papers are due the week the document or the movie is assigned. Every student must have completed one of these papers by 3 October and the other by 7 November. The third, somewhat longer paper (2000-3000 words), one requiring a good measure of research, will be a critical introduction to a document in the cultural history of the period not assigned in the course. This may be a book, a movie, a radio show, a building, or any other sort of significant document of your choosing. Due 12 December.

In addition to the three short papers described above, each graduate student, will write an essay review (2000-3000 words) of the sort that might be published in *Reviews in American History* of one (or more) books on the cultural history of the period, chosen from the attached list. If they wish, undergraduates may write this paper in lieu of one of the two critical essays. Due 28 November.

**Grading**

Grading in the course will be weighted as follows: Undergraduates: short papers (20% each); longer paper (40%); class participation (20%). Graduate Students: short papers (15% each); longer paper (30%); book review (20%); class participation (20%).

**Class Meetings and Assignments**

**5 September Introduction**

Recommended: Warren Susman, "The Culture of the Thirties"
Lawrence Levine, "American Culture and the Great Depression"
Susan Smulyan, *Popular Ideologies*, Introduction
Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 3-12

Purple Rose of Cairo (in class)

**12 September Down and Out**

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*
Woody Guthrie, *Dust Bowl Ballads* (audio streamed on electronic reserve)

Recommended: Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 259-282
Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 70-153, 522-530

Movie: *Grapes of Wrath*
19 SEPTEMBER  NEW DEAL

Lawrence and Cornelia Levine, ed., The Fireside Conversations. Michael Bernstein, "Why the Depression Was Great"  
David Kennedy, "What the New Deal Did"  
Jefferson Cowrie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception"

Movies: Pere Lorentz, Plow that Broke the Plains and The River

26 SEPTEMBER  POPULAR FRONT

John Dos Passos, The Big Money  
♫ Paul Robeson, "Ballad for Americans"

Recommended: Michael Denning, The Cultural Front, xiii-xx, 3-114, 163-199, 362-402, 423-462  
Morris Dickstein, Dancing in the Dark, 342-354, 441-463, 477-506

Movie: Citizen Kane

3 OCTOBER  LITTLE MAN, WHAT NOW?

Nathanael West, A Cool Million  
Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People,

Recommended: Morris Dickstein, Dancing in the Dark, 215-310

Movie: Christmas in July

10 OCTOBER  THE BURDEN OF SOUTHERN HISTORY

William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom!  
John Donald Wade, "The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius" in Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand

Movie: Gone with the Wind

17 OCTOBER  AMERICAN DILEMMA

Richard Wright, Native Son  
Richard Wright, "Introduction" to St.Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, Black Metropolis  
♫ Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit"
Recommended: Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 323-361
Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 173-211, 464-476

Movie: *Porgy and Bess*

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24 October  Fast Talking Dames

Mary McCarthy, *The Company She Keeps*
♪ Duke Ellington, "Sophisticated Lady"

Movie: *The Women*

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31 October  Soundtrack

Bruce Lenthall, *Radio's America*
♪ Bing Crosby, "Dancing in the Dark," "Stardust,"
♫ Duke Ellington, "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got that Swing," "Mood Indigo," "Take the A Train"
♫ Benny Goodman, "One O'Clock Jump," "Sing, Sing, Sing"
♫ Aaron Copland, "Fanfare for the Common Man," "Appalachian Spring"
Alex Ross, "Music for All"

Recommended: Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 408-438
Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 283-322
♫ Benny Goodman at Carnegie Hall, 1938

Movie: *Gold Diggers of 1933*

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7 November  Streamlined Elegance

Jeffrey Meikle, *Twentieth-Century Limited*

Recommended: Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, 357-407

Movie: *Shall We Dance?*

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14 November  Tomorrowland

Stanley Applebaum, ed., *The New York World's Fair 1939/40*
David Gelernter, *1939: The Lost World of the Fair*
Warren Susman, "The People's Fair"

Movie: *The City*

**21 NOVEMBER  NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING**

**28 NOVEMBER  LA NOIR**

Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*
James M. Cain, "Paradise"
Philip Hanson, "The Arc of National Confidence and the Birth of Film Noir"

Movie: *Double Indemnity*

**5 DECEMBER  THE GOOD WAR**

Michael Adams, *The Best War Ever*

Movie: *Hail*

**12 DECEMBER  HOME FRONT**

Studs Terkel, *The "Good War"*, 108-185, 301-349, 574-589
Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers*

Movie: *Best Years of Our Lives*

Recommended: Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 463-472
Raymond Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom*
Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific*
Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film*
Andrew Bergman, *We're in the Money: Depression America and Its Films*
Sheri Biesen, *Blackout*
John Blum, *V Was for Victory*
Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*
Laura Browder, *Rousing the Nation*
Raymond Carney, *American Vision: The Films of Frank Capra*
Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*
Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal*
Peter Conn, *The American 1930s: A Literary History*
Terry Cooney, *Balancing Acts*
__________, *The Rise of the New York Intellectuals*
James Curtis, *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered*
Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front*
Maria DiBattista, *Fast-Talking Dames*
Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*
Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War*
Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism*
Lewis Erenberg, *Swingin' the Dream*
John Diggins, *Up from Communism*
John Dower, *War Without Mercy*
Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations*
Paul Fussell, *Wartime*
Gary Giddens, *Bing Crosby: A Pocketful of Dreams*
Alice Goldfarb, *Hopes and Ashes*
Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits*
David Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition*
James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*
William Grachner, *The Age of Doubt*
James Gregory, *American Exodus*
Molly Haskell, *Frankly, My Dear*
Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini*
David Jenemann, *Adorno in America*
John Jordan, *Machine-Age Ideology*
Elizabeth Kendall, *Runaway Bride*
Richard King, *A Southern Renaissance*
Joe Klein, *Woody Guthrie*
Clayton Koppes and Gregory Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*
Judith Kutulas, *The Long War*
Peter La Chapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie*
Alan Lawson, *A Commonwealth of Hope*
Sean McCann, Gumshoe America
Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream
Karal Ann Marling, Wall-to-Wall America
Barbara Melosh, Engendering Culture
James Murphy, The Proletarian Moment
David Peeler, Hope Among Us Yet
Richard Pells, Radical Visions and American Dreams
David Plotke, Building a Democratic Political Order
Dana Polan, Power and Paranoia
Paula Rabinowitz, Labor and Desire
George Roeder, Jr., The Censored War
Barbara Savage, Broadcasting Freedom
Thomas Schatz, The Genius of the System
Amity Shlaes, The Forgotten Man
Robert Shulman, The Power of Political Art
Daniel Singal, The War Within
Lauren Sklaroff, Black Culture and the New Deal
Wendy Smith, Real Life Drama
Catherine Stock, Main Street in Crisis
William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America
David Stowe, Swing Changes
Gregory Sumner, Dwight Macdonald and the Politics Circle
Michael Szalay, New Deal Modernism
Robert Vanderlan, Intellectuals Incorporated
Alan Wald, Exiles from a Future Time
_______., Trinity of Passion
Heather Warren, Theologians of a New World Order
David Welky, Everything Was Better in America: Print Culture in the Great Depression
Donald Worster, Dust Bowl