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21H.126 America in Depression and War
Spring 2003

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MIT, Fall 2003
M, 7-10

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oh: Wed, 1-3

21H. 126: America in Depression and War

This course examines the transforming effect of two cataclysmic events in the twentieth century. We will study the ways in which both the Great Depression and World War II led to a major reordering of American politics and society. By focusing on how the government and the country dealt with these national crises, we will explore a significant moment in the evolution of American political culture. In other words, we will examine how ordinary people experienced depression and war and how those experiences changed their outlook on politics and the world around them. Topics include unemployment and economic decline, the rise of organized labor, New Deal politics, women in the war effort, the Japanese internment, the development of atomic science, and America as a world superpower.

This class will consist of a combination of lectures and discussions. You will be required to do the reading in advance and come prepared to talk about what you have read. To help facilitate discussion, you will write a 1-page response to the readings in advance of class and bring it with you. Occasionally, you will gather primary documents from the library and/or the web. In addition to class assignments and discussion, you will each write two 5-page papers on the assigned readings. There will be a final exam at the end of the semester. Discussion and response papers (25%), two papers (25% each), final exam (25%). Instead of the second paper and final exam, you may also write a 15-page research paper (50%). You must have your topic by October 6.

Readings will come from the following books:
John Kenneth Galbraith, The Great Crash, 1929
Robert McElvaine, Down and Out in the Great Depression
Alan Brinkley, Voices of Protest
Studs Terkel, The Good War
Lewis Erenberg and Susan Hirsch, The War in American Culture
Richard Polenberg, The Era of Franklin D. Roosevelt

Introduction: From Breadlines to Atom Bombs
September 8

Part One: The Great Depression
September 15: The End of Prosperity
Galbraith, 1-42, 66-143, 168-194

September 29: The Unemployed

McElvaine, pp. 33-120

Part Two: New Deal

October 8: Roosevelt's 100 Days (note: this class will meet on Wednesday for this week only)

Brinkley, pp. 3-142; Polenberg, 1-1,2; 2-3, 4

October 20: Strikes and Struggles

McElvaine, pp. 121-229; Polenberg, 2-1; 4

October 27: New Deal Order

Brinkley, pp. 143-268; Polenberg, 1-3,4,5; 2-2,4,5; 5

Paper One Due

Part Three: World War II at Home

November 3: From Isolationism to Pearl Harbor

Brinkley in Erenberg and Hirsh; Terkel, pp. 19-37

November 17: Mobilizing for Victory

Duis, Gerstle, Hirsch, and Moore in Erenberg and Hirsh;

Terkel, pp. 301-342; Polenberg, 8, 9-9

November 24: Gender and Race in Wartime

Roeder, May, May, and Escobar in Erenberg and Hirsh; Terkel, pp. 108-125; 135-165; Polenberg, 6-4, 9- 1,2,3,6,7,8

Paper Two Due

Part Four: World War II Abroad

December 1: D-Day

Erenberg in Erenberg and Hirsh; Terkel, pp. 38-58, 166-197, 254-293

December 8: Hiroshima

Dower in Erenberg and Hirsh; Terkel, pp. 59-66, 69-79, 85-97, 505-530, 545-55

Final Exam TBA