

George Mason University
Department of History and Art History

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Office hours: By appointment

Fall 2021
Thursdays, 7:20-10pm
Online synchronous

History 634, Section 001: Interwar America, 1918-1939

From the "war to end all wars" to the rise of the "greatest generation," the period between 1918 and 1939 was tumultuous and saw the start of many political, social, and cultural trends that have continued to influence life in the United States up to the present day. This reading seminar asks students to examine U.S. history between the world wars in-depth from a variety of perspectives. Assignments focus on developing fundamental skills of the historian, such as reviewing books, creating bibliographies, and evaluating the historical scholarship in an area of interest.

Required books: (see Blackboard for additional readings; books marked with an * are available as e-books from Mason Libraries)

*Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (Oxford, 1991).
Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (Oxford, 2010).

Lisa McGirr, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State* (Norton, 2016).

*Mai Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Updated edition, Princeton, 2014).

*Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (2d ed., Cambridge University Press, 2008 or Canto Classics, 2014).

*David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (Oxford, 1999).

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

Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (Liveright, 2013).

*James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (Oxford, 2013).

Course requirements and grading:

- Active, informed, & thoughtful participation, including submission of at least SIX reading summaries, due at NOON on class days via Blackboard (30%)
- Essay, 6-7 pages (1800-2100 words), due via Blackboard by 7:20 p.m. on Sept. 30 (20%)
- Primary source project, including oral presentation on Oct. 28 (20%)
- Final essay, 10-12 pages (3000-3600 words) due by 7:20 p.m. on Dec. 9 (30%)

Participation and reading summaries: I expect students to read each week's assignment thoroughly and come to class prepared to ask questions, raise issues, and engage in a thought-provoking conversation. I will do my best to judge participation more on the intellectual quality than the sheer quantity of a student's comments, but quantity is also important because students

who are eager to talk demonstrate familiarity with the readings and provide intellectual stimulation for the whole group.

Over the course of the semester, each student must submit SIX reading summaries of 300-400 words each. Summaries are due by NOON on class days, and it is up to you to decide which weeks' readings you want to write about. Although I'm calling these short papers "summaries," I want them to include an analytical response. **Write one paragraph that summarizes the arguments and scholarly contributions of the week's reading and a second paragraph that evaluates it for its sources, methods, and interpretations. Include at least 2-3 substantive questions you'd like to make sure we discuss in class.**

I will give every student a preliminary participation grade along with my comments on the first essay.

First essay: This essay will require you to synthesize our first few weeks of readings. The format will be like that of essays in *Reviews in American History*, as we'll discuss in class.

Primary source project: This assignment is intended to crowd-source our coverage of New Deal cultural history while allowing each student to pursue an interest through primary source research. Early in the semester, I'll recommend a few secondary sources that can help you identify cultural history topics of particular relevance for our period. After that, it will be up to you to identify primary and secondary sources that will allow you to put together a solid discussion of your topic. The final product needs to be an oral presentation accompanied by a PowerPoint, Prezi, StoryMap, Timeline JS, or other audiovisual resource. A proposal and preliminary bibliography outlining your topic and approach is due on Sept. 16. After that, we'll work out the details of the project one-on-one.

Final essay: The final essay will ask you to synthesize our course readings, especially those on the New Deal era, with the goal of developing a theme and a historiographical argument. Rather than trying to write about every reading we've done, you'll be trying to offer a coherent "take" on the scholarly conversation about a key subject such as race and civil rights, the role of the federal government in American life, gender relations, or class conflict.

Course schedule and readings:

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| Aug. 26 | Course introduction; discuss Hartmann review essay (on Blackboard) |
| Sept. 2 | The Progressive Era: discuss Muncy book, Wilmington video, and Gilmore chapter (on Blackboard) |
| Sept. 9 | World War I: discuss Capozzola book and chapters from Lentz-Smith, <i>Freedom Struggles</i> (e-book linked on Blackboard) |
| Sept. 16 | Prohibition: discuss McGirr book
Proposal for Primary Source Project due via Blackboard |
| Sept. 23 | Immigration restriction: discuss Ngai book, pp. xv-166 and 2004 Foreword (on Blackboard for those using Mason e-book edition) |
| Sept. 30 | Documentary: <i>American Reds</i> (2016), YouTube link on Blackboard
First essay due via Blackboard |

- Oct. 7 The New Deal from the Bottom Up: discuss Cohen book
- Oct. 14 New Deal Policies and People: discuss Kennedy book, pp. 1-380
- Oct. 21 New Deal Environmentalism: discuss Maher book
- Oct. 28 **Presentations on Primary Source Projects**
- Nov. 4 No class; start reading Katznelson, *Fear Itself*
- Nov. 11 The Long New Deal?: discuss Katznelson book and Fraser and Gerstle intro (on Blackboard)
- Nov. 18 FDR's Foreign Policy: discuss essays by Doenecke, Stoler, and Leffler (on Blackboard)
- Nov. 25 Thanksgiving
- Dec. 2 The Homefront in WWII: discuss Sparrow book

Final essay due by 7:20 p.m. on December 9 via Blackboard

Class policies and additional information:

Academic Integrity:

I expect students in this course to live up to George Mason University's Honor Code, which states: "Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work." I will pursue any concerns about academic dishonesty and will report suspected students to the University's Honor Board for disciplinary action, including a failing grade in the course.

Attendance and late paper policy:

Students may miss a single class without penalty; however, even one absence is strongly discouraged and any additional absences will significantly affect the course grade. If you miss a class when you are supposed to give an oral presentation, there will be no way to make up that part of the assignment. Please contact me well in advance of any necessary absence.

I will accept late papers with a penalty of half a letter grade for every 24-hour period past the deadline.

Accommodations:

Students who require academic accommodations should contact me promptly and must make arrangements through the Office of Disability Services (ods.gmu.edu; 703-993-2474).

Other useful information:

Writing Center: <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/> or 703-993-1200

Counseling and Psychological Services: <https://caps.gmu.edu/> or 703-993-2380

Last day to drop with 100% tuition refund: Tues., Sept. 7

Last day to drop with 50% tuition refund: Tues., Sept. 14