

HISTORY 642.02
PROSEMINAR IN AMERICAN HISTORY:
California in the Great Depression: 1929-1941

Fall 2007

Thursdays, 4:10-6:55 p.m., HSS 152

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Course Overview: The history department's proseminars are designed as the culminating experience for history majors. In their proseminar, history students sharpen and apply the research and analytical skills and the knowledge that they have gained from other classes to the study of a particular topic. The proseminar is a research experience, in which students study what past historians have said about a particular subject and then conduct their own research into primary sources. In the proseminar, students practice all the skills of a historian: critically reading the works of other historians, formulating a research project, developing that project including research in primary sources, and presenting the results of that research orally and in writing.

In this proseminar, our topic is *California during the Great Depression* (1929-1941). This was a time of far-reaching change in American life, especially its economy and politics. California had boomed in the 1920s. People had poured into the Golden State, attracted by the promise of high-paying jobs, perpetual sunshine, and the glamour of Hollywood. The state's economy ran at full throttle, fueled by agriculture, oil, films, and manufacturing. Then the economy sputtered in 1929 and seemed to die in the years that followed. The "California Dream" seemed on the verge of becoming a nightmare, as unemployment soared and companies declared bankruptcy. The Democrats took charge of the federal government in 1933 and began to enact the reforms and recovery legislation that quickly came to be labeled the New Deal. California, however, remained securely Republican and conservative in the elections of 1930 and 1934. By 1934, however, various movements began to challenge the status quo—a long and violent maritime strike that affected all the state's ports and that produced a brief general strike in San Francisco (the largest US city ever to experience a general strike), an upheaval within the state Democratic party that gave the gubernatorial nomination to Upton Sinclair (a former socialist), a movement to provide benefits to older citizens (spearheaded by a Long Beach physician), and a series of strikes by farm workers (beginning in 1930, many led by Communist party members). By 1934, some California political and business leaders voiced fears of a Communist plot to take over California. Right-wing groups mobilized, led by business groups and the American Legion, to combat this perceived threat from the left. Throughout the rest of the 1930s, California was a site of political and economic conflict between business and unions, between the political left and right. All this contributed to an extraordinary outpouring of art and literature, some of it subsidized by the federal government through the WPA.

After some general readings and discussions about the work of historians on the 1930s and on California during the 1930s, student will develop a research project on some aspect of California's history during that decade. A list of possible research projects appears at the end of the syllabus.

Prerequisites: Completion of ENGL 214 and HIST 300 and upper-division or graduate status. Enrollment priority will be given to senior history majors and history graduate students.

Required Work and Grading: Students will submit six papers during the course of the semester: an ungraded proposal for a research paper, a review essay of works by historians, an ungraded essay surveying possible primary sources for the research paper, two drafts of a research paper, and a critique of papers by two other students. Each student will make three oral presentations to the seminar: (1) a review of a book (graded as part of your review essay), (2) your research findings (graded as part of your research paper), and (3) a critique of the work of two other students (graded as part of that paper). As seminar participants, all students will take part, each week, in discussing the work of historians and of each other. *To take part in discussion, it is necessary to attend class.* Do not cut class when a paper is due simply because you don't have the paper ready. That only compounds your problem, because the class participation portion of the grade is obviously sensitive to attendance. These elements will

determine your grade:

Description of Work	Date Due	Grading
Proposal for term paper	Sept. 6-13	ungraded
Review essay	Sept 21	30% of final grade
Progress report on primary sources	Oct 11	ungraded
Initial draft of research paper	Nov 15	10% of final grade
Critique of other students' papers	Nov 22-Dec 6	10% of final grade
Revised draft of research paper	Dec 20	40% of final grade
Class participation	Every class	10% of final grade

Unless you notify me that you wish to be graded on a CR/NC basis (Credit/No Credit), all grades will be letter grades. If you fail to submit a paper on time, it is your responsibility to make arrangements for completing the requirement at a later time. Failure to submit any essay but the last (see instructions) may mean that an F will be averaged with your other grades and may cause you to fail the course. It is your responsibility to initiate a request for a grade of I (incomplete). Finally, although it should not be necessary to say so, plagiarism will result in failing the course.

Office Hours, Appointments, Messages, and E-Mail Listserver

Office Hours: 2-3:30 p.m., Thursdays, and by appointment.

Office: Old Science building, room 223.

Office phone and voicemail: 405-4034.

E-mail: cherny@sfsu.edu I check my e-mail every day; please write if you have a question or comment about the seminar. I'll usually get your message sooner if you use e-mail than if you leave a message on my voicemail.

I've scheduled my office hours right before class, but I'm often on campus on other days. If you want to set up an appointment, please send me e-mail to arrange appointments at other times than my regular office hours. If you want to leave a paper or message for me, do not put it under the door of my office; instead, take it to the History Department office (Old Sci 276), and have it put in my mailbox. I'm sorry to report that my office is in one of the very few remaining parts of the University that are not completely accessible; coming to my office requires using several steps. If we need to meet elsewhere than my office, please let me know so we can arrange a meeting elsewhere.

Readings:

Recommended Reference Works: The following books should be available at the bookstore; you will want them in your personal library if you are serious about writing:

Strunk, William, Jr., and E. G. White. *The Elements of Style*.

Turabian, K.L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 6th edn.

A good dictionary; I prefer the *Oxford American Dictionary*, but any good one will do.

Required Readings (available at the bookstore):

Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression : America, 1929-1941* , rev edn. (Three Rivers Press).

Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California*. (Oxford University Press).

There will also be other required readings available in the electronic reserve service of the library. I shall announce the password in class on the first day. In the list that follows, items in the electronic reserve are marked with an asterisk (*). Start on the required reading immediately and try to complete them all as soon as possible. Do not wait until the week they are discussed in class.

Optional Background Readings: This course assumes you are familiar with American history between the world wars. If you feel uncertain about your knowledge of national politics for the period, you may want to consult an American history textbook (the texts usually assigned in History 121). You may also want to consult one or more of the following:

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of FDR*, 3 vols.

William Leuchtenburg, *FDR and the New Deal*

For background in local and state politics, you may want to look at a California history textbook (the texts usually assigned in History 450).

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS

Aug. 30 (1st week): Introduction to the Course. Topics: What is a proseminar? How is a proseminar different from other upper-division history courses? Course organization and requirements. Overview of the seminar topic: California in the Great Depression; historians' views on these subjects; opportunities for original research.

Aug 31-Sept 13: Individual appointments to discuss research topics; a schedule will be circulated in class.

Sept. 6 (2nd week): Using the Internet to Do Historical Research.

Meet in the computer lab, location to be announced.

First paper due (proposal for research project)

Sept. 13 (3rd week): Using Archival Sources to Do Historical Research.

Meet at the Labor Archives, 480 Winston Drive. Please be prompt.

Sept. 20 (4th week): Historiography: Historians' treatments of the Great Depression.

Required Reading: McElvaine.

Sept. 21, 28, Oct. 4, 11 (5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th weeks), first class presentations: Historians' treatments of California between the World Wars.

Required Reading: Starr

*Selections to be announced from Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco*; Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*; Robert W. Cherny, "Prelude to the Popular Front: The Communist Party of California, 1930-1935"; Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression*; Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*; Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry*; David Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco*; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*.

Sept. 21 (5th week): Review Essay (second paper) due

Oct 11 (8th week): Survey of primary sources (third paper) due.

Oct 18 (9th week): Guest speaker(s) to be announced. Come prepared with questions from your own research.

Oct 25 (10th week): Dr. Gray Brechin will speak on the "Living New Deal Project" (see <http://newdealproject.org/>), focusing especially on surviving structures created by the PWA and WPA in California. Come prepared with questions from your own research.

Nov 1, Nov 8 (10th and 11th weeks): Individual conferences to discuss research projects.

Nov 15 (12th week): Exchange first draft of research paper (fourth paper). Make *three* copies of your paper, one for each of your student critics and one for me. Send me, as an e-mail attachment, a copy of your paper in either Word or pdf format, so that it can be put onto the electronic reserve for the class to read.

Nov 22, Nov 29, Dec 6, Dec 13 (13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th weeks): Presentation of Research Projects to the Class.

Critiques (fifth paper) due at time of presentation but no later than Dec 6.

Dec 20 (final exam week): Final draft of research paper (sixth paper) due.

WRITTEN AND ORAL REQUIREMENTS

All required papers should be done on a word-processor, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. (If this is a problem, discuss it with the instructor promptly.) For this class, staple each paper in the upper left-hand corner; do not put your paper in a binder. Citations should be done as **footnotes** (**not** endnotes), numbered consecutively from first to last; if your word-processing program will not do footnotes, see me to discuss that situation. Follow all rules of citation in Turabian. There should be no errors of grammar or spelling; use your spelling checker. If the paper is more than one page long, each page must be numbered. Papers will be evaluated for both content and composition, and errors in form will be penalized. Always keep a copy of any paper you turn in.

Late Papers: Papers are late if they are not submitted in or before class on the day they are due. Papers that are missing at the end of the semester are graded as F unless you have made prior arrangements with me. Submit late papers in the history department office (Old Sci 276) so they can be put into my mailbox; **do put late papers under my office door.** Late papers will be penalized by reducing the grade by one level (e.g., from A to A-) unless you present a written excuse based on a medical, family, or work-related emergency. Papers more than a week late may be penalized further.

Initial Class Presentations: During these weeks, we shall explore some of what historians have written about the Great Depression in California. The purpose of this part of the seminar is for each of you to develop a sense of the basic historiography--what historians have said and how they have differed. Each week, all seminar members will complete a set of basic readings. In addition, each week, several of you will present a summary of either a book or several articles that supplement the basic readings for that day; thus, all of you will multiply your coverage of historians' work on the subject. In selecting the work to present to the class, chose a book from the list of recommended readings that seems likely to be centrally related to your own research project; you can then incorporate your work for the class presentation into your review essay and later your final paper. These summaries should be about 10 minutes in length. In your presentation, summarize the subject and thesis of the work. Critique the work. Conclude your presentation with one or more questions for the seminar to discuss, either questions having to do with the relation of the work to the assigned reading or questions that the work raise for our larger seminar topic. There will be several presentations during each class session; work closely with the others presenting during the same class session to compare your approaches and your discussion questions on the required readings. I expect to meet with you, either individually or in a group, at least a week before your presentation to review your outline for your presentation and to see your discussion questions. The discussion questions should be posted to our class listserv a week before class.

Term Research Project. You should begin work on this project at the beginning of the semester and spend as much time as possible on it until it is due. The project will be completed in five stages:

1. An initial proposal (ungraded). This will be ungraded. Write a page or less describing your research interests for this course. If the paper you want to do is related to other work you have done or intend to do for another class, let me know that. Include as much as you know about work by historians that is related to the topic and about primary sources for the topic.

2. Review essay (30% of course grade). The purpose of this essay is (a) to survey several works by historians that are directly relevant to your own research project and (b) to come out of your survey with one or more questions that you hope to answer through your own research into the primary sources. This is the first step toward a successful research paper: defining your purpose in relation to the work of previous historians. Examples: women during the Great Depression, organized labor in the 1930s, environmental issues in the 1930s, the 1934 maritime and general strikes, agricultural workers' unions in the 1930s.

In developing this essay, you should use at least two books (3-4 articles count as one book) **in addition to the required readings.** Do not use articles and books by the same author, as authors often incorporate material from their articles into their books. Be certain to include all the **relevant** required

readings in your analysis and choose additional works that seem likely to be the most relevant for your research project. You will probably want to include, as one of the additional works, the book you review for the class. Look for possibilities on the lists of recommended readings; see the instructor to discuss the appropriateness of other books or articles you may locate through InvestiGATOR, MELVYL, or *America: History and Life*. I must approve any book or article not on the supplemental list.

In your essay, devote about 7-8 pages to a summary and critique of the works (including treatment of the thesis) and 2-3 pages to an exploration of the relation between these works and your research paper (including, especially, a set of questions that you hope to answer through your research in the primary sources), for a total of about 9-10 pages. The title should be REVIEW ESSAY, and the first thing in the essay should be complete bibliographic citations to the works you are reviewing. If you are in doubt as to the proper way to do this, look at the review essays in *Reviews in American History* (available in the periodicals section of the library). The bulk of your essay should be on works other than the required readings for the class, but you should at least mention those assigned readings are directly relevant to your topic. Attach a bibliography based on a search using InvestiGATOR, MELVYL, CARL/Uncover, and *America: History and Life* in which you present up to 10 works by historians that seem to have a bearing on your research topic. This may be simply a printout of a MELVYL search. (This bibliography is in addition to the 9-10 pages of text.)

3. A progress report on primary sources (ungraded). The purpose of this essay (1-2 pages) is to survey the primary sources that you intend to use for your final paper. Your final paper must be based largely on primary sources. If you have any question whether a given source is properly considered to be a primary source, discuss this with me as early as possible. Begin this report with the questions you want to answer in your paper, then indicate how you hope to find the answers to those questions in particular primary sources.

4. Initial draft of full research paper (10% of course grade). Organize your paper in this sequence: a brief introduction (no more than 1 page); a survey of historiography, derived from your review essay, that includes, or concludes with, an explicit statement of your purpose, i.e., the question(s) that your paper attempts to answer (3-5 pages at most); the results of your research into primary source materials, including, as appropriate, whatever narrative of events is necessary to understand your analysis (8-10 pages); a conclusion that briefly summarizes your findings, ties them to your initial questions and to the existing historiography, and, as appropriate, indicates questions for further research (1-2 pages, for a total of about 15 pages exclusive of the bibliography); a bibliography, divided into primary sources and secondary works. Make three copies: one for me and one for each student critic. **Do not write more than 20 pages at the very most! I shall not read past page 20!**

5. Final, revised draft of the paper (40% of course grade). Revise your paper in the light of the critiques (mine and other students') and the class discussion of your paper. This paper is optional--if you submit no revision by the end of the semester, the grade assigned to the initial draft will also be recorded for the final draft. If and when you submit this paper, **include your initial draft as well**. In grading your paper (both first and revised drafts), I shall pay particular attention to the following: (1) your handling of primary sources, including the sources you used and your analysis of them; (2) your treatment of historiography, including both the works you used and your treatment of them; (3) the effectiveness of your argument and your conclusion; (4) the thoroughness of your bibliography; and (5) the quality of your writing and the extent to which your paper follows all the rules regarding form. I cannot put an exact proportional value on each of these criteria, but I shall evaluate your paper according to each of them, and I have listed them in my order of priority.

Part of your grade on the paper will also be based on your presentation of your findings to the seminar. Organize this carefully. This should not be simply a reading of your paper, but should be an **adaptation** of your paper for the purposes of an oral presentation.

Maximum length: either 15 or 20 minutes (to be announced in class). During each of these classes, we shall have several presentations, followed by the critics for those papers, then a short discussion of the papers. There is not a great deal of flexibility in the schedule. The length of time specified for you to

deliver your paper is both a target and a maximum; practice your presentation by actually speaking aloud and timing yourself. Do not exceed this maximum, but don't be so frightened of going over your time that you make only a five or ten minute presentation; that is as troublesome as going over the limit. Practice makes perfect, so far as timing goes. Some of you may find it difficult to make this sort of oral presentation; please talk to me about your situation early in the semester, so we can explore options.

Critiques of other students' research papers (10% of course grade): I shall assign two critics to each paper. The critics will comment to the seminar following the presentation of the papers themselves. Preparing your critique of other students' papers is very similar to preparing a book review. There is one important difference: you will be dealing with the work of someone in the same room with you. Please keep your criticism constructive. You should develop your critique in writing, at a length of 2-3 pages, or about 5 minutes per paper. You need not develop these points in this order, but they are the central points to develop in any critique: (1) Briefly identify the subject and thesis of the paper and indicate the nature of the evidence used to develop and support the thesis. Is the paper organized effectively? Do the conclusions follow logically from the presentation of the material? Is the paper clearly written? (2) As appropriate, indicate questions for the author, including questions that he/she may want to clarify in revising the paper for final submission. You will present your critique orally to the seminar, but you should also provide a written version to me and to the author of the paper. Bring 2 copies of each critique to class, one for me and one for the author of the paper. You should distribute your written critique as soon as you have it done (and no later than Dec. 8), rather than waiting for the day when you present it in class.

Graduate Students: Graduate students who wish to take this course for graduate credit should first consult with one of the graduate coordinators and then, if approved, register for History 642.2 (thereby reserving a place in the class), then drop it after the first class meeting and add History 899 for three units. Graduate students' papers should be at least 20 pages in length exclusive of the bibliography; maximum length for graduate students' papers is 30 pages.

Possible Term Paper Topics: For each of these possible topics, consider how the patterns you find are related to the historiographical patterns we discuss in class.

1. An election: what were the issues, who were the candidates, how did the campaign develop, what was the outcome, how did significant groups affect the outcome? This could be an election for mayor, governor, member of congress, or president. Examples: the state elections of 1934 or 1938; the San Francisco city elections of 1931, 1935, 1939; the presidential elections of 1932, 1936, or 1940; the elections of US senators in 1930, 1934, 1936, 1940.
2. A session of the state legislature: what were the issues, what groups were most actively involved in lobbying, how did organized interest groups seek to accomplish their purposes, which were most successful? Or just focus on one controversial issue that came before the legislature, e.g., repeal of the criminal syndicalism law or enactment of a tax on chain stores.
3. The administration of a mayor or governor: how did the individual get elected, what promises were made during the campaign, what support did the candidate have from parties or organized interest groups, how did campaign promises and support affect the person's conduct of office? Or examine the way that an officeholder responded to some crisis, e.g., a major strike.
4. A minor party or organized interest group: how did the organization define itself, what purposes did it seek to accomplish through politics, how did it take part in politics, how successful was it? Examples: the San Francisco Labor Council, the state CIO, the state Federation of Women's Clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, the Sierra Club, the Socialist party, the Communist party, EPIC, the Townsend movement, Ham and Eggs, the American Legion, various ethnic groups.
5. A strike or some aspect of a strike (one of the agricultural strikes, the 1934 or 1936-37 maritime strikes, the 1934 streetcar strike, or any one of many others). How did unions and employers define their purposes? How did they seek to involve others in their struggle? How successful were they? Alternatively, a study of a particular union, whether or not the union was involved in a major strike: how did the union respond to changes in law (7-a and Wagner)? How did the union's membership change? Were there internal struggles over leadership?
6. A biography or partial biography of a person who was significantly involved in events.
7. A structural or policy issue: Explore an issue over time, looking at the groups who favored it, those

who opposed it, the development of campaigns, success or failure.

8. Some aspect of the WPA in northern California (e.g., the art, music, or theater projects; other work projects; efforts to organize or mobilize WPA workers; criticism of the WPA from the right).

9. Some aspect of PWA in northern California (pick a particular project and trace it through from beginning to completion).

10. The response to *The Grapes of Wrath* in California.

11. The effect of the "Indian New Deal" on California Indians, based on records at the National Archives in San Bruno.

12. The effect of the Great Depression on a particular person or family.

13. The effect of the Great Depression on a particular part of San Francisco.

Mine the information in Kevin Starr's book for more possibilities.