

Culture in the 1930s

TERMS AND NAMES

Gone With the Wind Popular movie
Orson Welles Actor, director, and filmmaker
Grant Wood Artist
Richard Wright Author
The Grapes of Wrath Novel by John Steinbeck

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you learned about the New Deal coalition.
In this section, you will learn about American culture during the Depression.

AS YOU READ

Use the chart below to take notes on radio, the movies, literature, and the arts during the Depression.

Movies	Popular escape inexpensive
Radio	
Literature	
Arts	

The Lure of Motion Pictures and Radio (pages 510–512)

What did Americans do for fun during the Depression?

The 1930s were a golden age for the radio and film industries in spite of the hard economic times. Movie tickets were not expensive, and films provided an escape from the problems of Depression life. About two-thirds of Americans went to a movie once a week.

Hollywood studios made a wide variety of movies and created many new movie stars. One of the most popular films of all time was *Gone With*

the Wind (1939). Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were dancing partners who made many movies together. Other popular movies in the 1930s included *The Wizard of Oz* and the Disney animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Audiences flocked to see comedies starring the Marx Brothers and also to see dark, gritty gangster movies.

Frank Capra made a different type of movie. In his movies, honest, kind-hearted people won out over greedy people.

Radio showed the democratic spirit of the times. There were radios in nearly 90 percent of American homes. Most American families listened

to their favorite radio shows together. The radio offered inexpensive entertainment. There were comedy and variety shows, news programs, soap operas, and children's shows. There were also excellent dramas and mysteries.

Radio made people like Bob Hope, Jack Benny, and George Burns and Gracie Allen stars long before they had success on television. In order to reach the greatest number of people, President Roosevelt went on the radio during his famous fire-side chats.

The most famous radio broadcast was by **Orson Welles**. He was an actor, director, and filmmaker. His fictional radio show "The War of the Worlds" was so realistic that it convinced many Americans that Martians had landed in New Jersey. It showed the power of radio at a time when many Americans got their news that way.

1. What was the appeal of movies and radio during the Depression?

The Arts in Depression America

(pages 512–514)

***How** did the New Deal help artists?*

The art and literature of the Depression was more serious and sober than radio and movies. Many artists used realism to show the hardships of Depression life. Some criticized American society. Others praised the strength of character and the democratic values of the American people.

Some people believed that the government should not play any role in funding arts projects. But New Deal officials believed the arts were important for the nation. They created several programs to put artists to work.

The Federal Arts Project was part of the WPA. It paid artists to create posters, murals, and other works of art for public places. Artists such as Thomas Hart Benton and **Grant Wood** painted rural midwestern subjects. Wood's *American Gothic*, a portrait of a serious-looking man and woman standing in front of their farmhouse, remains symbolic of life during the Depression.

The Federal Theater Project was another part of the WPA. It helped support American playwrights. It also brought live drama to many communities around the country.

Woody Guthrie was a folksinger who used music to capture the hardships of the Depression. Guthrie traveled the country and met thousands of people struggling to get by and wrote songs about what he saw. The Federal Writers' Project funded writers. Saul Bellow was one of these writers. He later won a Pulitzer Prize. **Richard Wright** was an African-American writer. He received financial help while writing *Native Son*. This novel shows the problems racism caused for a young African-American man.

John Steinbeck also got help from the FWP. His novel *The Grapes of Wrath* is one of the most famous books about the Depression. It shows the problems faced by Oklahoma farmers who were forced from their homes during the Dust Bowl. They became migrant workers. They made it to California, but their hardships continued.

Another notable book of the Depression was by the writer James Agee and the photographer Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* showed the dignity of Alabama sharecroppers in the face of hardship. The play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder captured the warmth and beauty of small-town life.

2. Describe two New Deal programs that supported the arts.