

Lawrence Levine, “American Culture and the Great Depression”

1. How did trauma, fear, desire for security, and shame all contribute to Americans’ reaction to the Great Depression? How do these factors help explain why there was no movement for a “revolution” during the 1930s?
2. Who were Americans most likely to blame for the bad conditions they had to endure during the Great Depression?
3. Why are the “abjectly poor” more likely to be **conservative** than **radical** in response to their situation?
4. How did advertising and the messages advertisers used to market their products during the 1930s relate to the economic conditions of the time?
5. How did the popular culture of the 1930s resonate with Americans who were suffering from economic hard times? What messages did popular culture send to audiences?
6. According to Levine, why did *Gone with the Wind* (the novel and the movie) resonate with 1930s audiences?
7. What heroic figure from 1930s popular culture, according to Levine, “symbolized public unrest with...institutions and bureaucracies”?
8. How did gangster films and hard-boiled detective stories suggest that traditional American values might be changing as a result of the Depression?
9. Why is it difficult to make generalizations about the 1930s? Why was the period a complicated one in American history?

Robert Sklar, “The Golden Age of Turbulence and the Golden Age of Order”

1. How did the economic conditions of the Great Depression affect the kinds of movies Hollywood filmmakers produced?
2. How did the technical innovation of sound shape filmmaking and the content and settings of films? What genres of film benefited most from the introduction of sound?
3. In what ways did filmmakers use sound – from simple “noise” to music – to attract audiences to their movies?
4. How did gangster films speak to broader concerns about social disorder and lawlessness? Why do you think such films resonated with Depression Era audiences?

5. Why did the humor of Mae West and the Marx Brothers appeal to a society whose institutions and traditional culture were in crisis?
6. Why wasn't *Duck Soup* one of the Marx Brothers' bigger hits? Why might audiences in 1933 not have been receptive to the film's message?
7. What distinguished the first 1930s "golden age" of film from the second 1930s "golden age"?
8. What messages did the screwball comedies try to send to audiences?
9. How did the second generation of filmmakers differ from the first generation? How did their experiences and their self-image affect their approach to their craft?