



## Response to Readings

Saturday, May 7, 2005

### **The Documentary as Historical Source: The Dust Bowl, The New Deal, and *The Grapes of Wrath***

**Core theme:** The Country and the City: Nature and Neighborhood as Themes in American Life

Saturday's morning session looks at the history of agriculture, the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression, and the New Deal, and, most especially, at the way that story was told in the documentary movement of the 1930s. The centerpiece will be a viewing of Pare Lorentz's classic 1936 documentary film, *The Plow that Broke the Plains*. The documentary aesthetic of the depression-era as expressed in photographs, literature, and film will be placed in social, economic, and political context and illuminate that context at the same time.

#### **Reading Assignments:**

##### Secondary Sources:

Stott, William. *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Pages 3-140 and the photos between Parts 2 & 3 (after page 140)

Childs, Bill. *The Grapes of Wrath: Stage Notes*. Website at:

< <http://people.cohums.ohio-state.edu/childs1/grapesOfWrath.htm> >

This website contains information about the 1930s, the Depression, the New Deal, the documentary movement, the dust bowl and migration (some sections about the stage version of the Steinbeck novel, the production of which occasioned these notes, can be skimmed).

##### Primary Source:

Script, "Plow that Broke the Plains."

## Writing Assignment

After completing the readings, please choose ONE of the following questions to answer in 1-2 pages. Answers must be typed, double-spaced, and no more than two pages.

1. How important was the Democratic administration (i.e., "The New Deal") in promoting documentary expression in the 1930s? Would documentary expression in the 1930s have occurred without the aid of the Federal government? Is this a proper role for the government to take on?
2. Why did documentarians focus not on the Vanderbilts and the Morgans but rather on "the common man/woman" in the 1930s?
3. How is the 1930s documentary movement related to the diversity issues (multiculturalism) of the later 20th century?

## Optional Material:

Steinbeck, John. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939; various editions).

Thomson, Virgil. *The Plow that Broke the Plains*. Thomson's score for the documentary (and others he composed for Pare Lorentz) has been recorded numerous times and is available in libraries and music stores in various versions.

## Historic Architecture in the Heartland

In the afternoon session, Barbara Powers of the Ohio Historic Preservation Office will present an overview of American architecture as seen in Ohio from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Her presentation will especially note how a period's architecture reflects the society and culture that produced it. This presentation will help you develop ways to integrate the built environment that literally surrounds you classrooms into the history you teach.

Poppeliers, John C., and S. Allen Chambers. *What Style is It?: A Guide to American Architecture* (pub, 2003).

Skim through this reference work to get familiar with how it is organized and the sort of information it contains.