

CHAPTER
15

GUIDED READING *Society and Culture*

Section 4

As you read about how the Depression and New Deal influenced American culture, write notes in the appropriate boxes to answer the questions about each work.

Films and Radio Drama		
1. <i>Gone with the Wind</i>	What was it? Who created or appeared in it?	What was its theme?
2. <i>Mr. Smith Goes to Washington</i>	What was it? Who created or appeared in it?	What was its theme?
3. <i>The War of the Worlds</i>	What was it? Who created or appeared in it?	What was its theme?
4. <i>Waiting for Lefty</i>	What was it? Who created or appeared in it?	What was its theme?
Art and Literature		
5. <i>Native Son</i>	What was it? Who created or appeared in it?	What was its theme?
6. <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	What was it? Who created or appeared in it?	What was its theme?
7. <i>Our Town</i>	What was it? Who created or appeared in it?	What was its theme?
8. <i>American Gothic</i>	What was it? Who created or appeared in it?	What was its theme?

CHAPTER
15

RETEACHING ACTIVITY *Culture in the 1930s*

Section 4

Matching

A. Match the description in the second column with the person or work in the first column. Write the appropriate letter next to the word.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Woodie Guthrie | a. depicted difficulties of Dust Bowl farmers |
| _____ 2. <i>Gone with the Wind</i> | b. folksinger who captured daily hardships |
| _____ 3. Richard Wright | c. created “The War of the Worlds” radio show |
| _____ 4. <i>Grapes of Wrath</i> | d. creator of famous painting <i>American Gothic</i> |
| _____ 5. Orson Welles | e. famous Depression-era film |
| _____ 6. Grant Wood | f. author of <i>Native Son</i> |

Finding Main Ideas

B. The following questions deal with American culture during the Depression. Write your answers in the space provided.

1. How did the Federal Art Project help Depression-era artists?

2. Why did so many people regularly attend movies during the 1930s?

3. How did the art and literature of the Depression differ from the movie and radio productions of the time?

CHAPTER
15

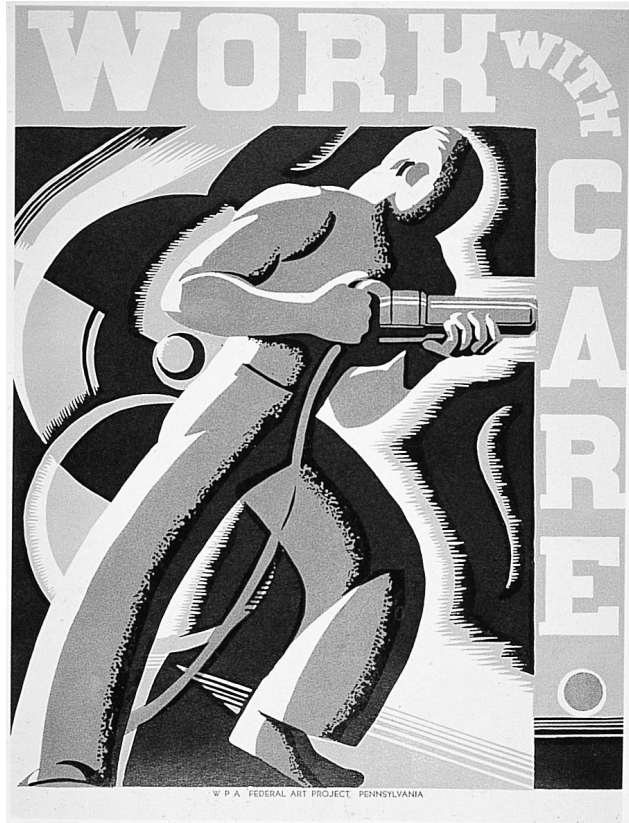
Section 4

PRIMARY SOURCE **WPA Posters**

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) created jobs for more than 8 million people and found work for unemployed writers, artists, actors, and musicians. Many artists, for example, were paid to create posters like these advertising the WPA. What positive values of American culture do these posters convey?



The Granger Collection, New York.



Research Options

1. Investigate whether any murals or buildings—post offices, schools, airports, libraries, hospitals, and so forth—in your community were created through the WPA. Then work with classmates to create a map showing the sites of these projects.
2. The WPA employed artists and writers such as Ben Shahn, Jackson Pollock, Saul Bellow, and Richard Wright. Choose one artist, writer, actor, or musician who worked for the WPA and write a brief description of the works he or she created in the 1930s.

CHAPTER
15

Section 4

PRIMARY SOURCE *from Let Us Now Praise
Famous Men*

In 1936 journalist James Agee and photographer Walker Evans researched rural life in America. Their collaboration, which was published in book form in 1941, yielded a record of the lives of three Alabama tenant families: the Gudgers, the Ricketts, and the Woods. According to this excerpt, what hardships did poor tenant farmers face?

What is earned at the end of a given year is never to be depended on and, even late in a season, is never predictable. It can be enough to tide through the dead months of the winter, sometimes even better: it can be enough, spread very thin, to take through two months, and a sickness, or six weeks, or a month: it can be little enough to be completely meaningless: it can be nothing: it can be enough less than nothing to insure a tenant only of an equally hopeless lack of money at the end of his next year's work: and whatever one year may bring in the way of good luck, there is never any reason to hope that that luck will be repeated in the next year or the year after that.

The best that Woods has ever cleared was \$1300 during a war year. During the teens and twenties he fairly often cleared as much as \$300; he fairly often cleared \$50 and less; two or three times he ended the year in debt. During the depression years he has more often cleared \$50 and less; last year he cleared \$150, but serious illness during the winter ate it up rapidly.

The best that Gudger has ever cleared is \$125. That was in the plow-under year. He felt exceedingly hopeful and bought a mule: but when his landlord warned him of how he was coming out the next year, he sold it. Most years he has not made more than \$25 to \$30; and about one year in three he has ended in debt. Year before last he wound up \$80 in debt; last year, \$12; of Boles, his new landlord, the first thing he had to do was borrow \$15 to get through the winter until rations advances should begin.

Years ago the Ricketts were, relatively speaking, almost prosperous. Besides their cotton farming they had ten cows and sold the milk, and they lived near a good stream and had all the fish they wanted. Ricketts went \$400 into debt on a fine young pair of mules. One of the mules died before it had made its first crop; the other died the year after; against his fear, amounting to full horror, of sinking to the half-crop level where nothing is owned, Ricketts went into debt for other, inferior mules; his cows went one by one into debts and desperate exchanges and by

sickness; he got congestive chills; his wife got pellagra; a number of his children died; he got appendicitis and lay for days on end under the ice cap; his wife's pellagra got into her brain; for ten consecutive years now, though they have lived on so little rations money, and have turned nearly all their cottonseed money toward their debts, they have not cleared or had any hope of clearing a cent at the end of the year.

It is not often, then, at the end of the season, that a tenant clears enough money to tide him through the winter, or even an appreciable part of it. More generally he can count on it that, during most of the four months between settlement time in the fall and the beginning of work and resumption of rations advances in the early spring, he will have no money and can expect none, nor any help, from his landlord: and of having no money during the six midsummer weeks of laying by, he can be still more sure. Four to six months of each year, in other words, he is much more likely than not to have nothing whatever, and during these months he must take care for himself: he is no responsibility of the landlord's. All he can hope to do is find work. This is hard, because there are a good many chronically unemployed in the towns, and they are more convenient to most openings for work and can at all times be counted on if they are needed; also there is no increase, during these two dead farming seasons, of other kinds of work to do. And so, with no more jobs open than at any other time of year, and with plenty of men convenient to take them, the whole tenant population, hundreds and thousands in any locality, are desperately in need of work.

from James Agee and Walker Evans, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941), 118–120.

Discussion Questions

1. What hardships did these three families face?
2. Which one of these families fared the worst? Explain.
3. What portrait of tenant farming does this excerpt portray?