

**Course Information**

**HUSL 6309** Section 001

**American Political Thirties**

Spring 2013

Mondays, 1:00 – 3:45 PM, JO 4.708

**Professor Contact Information**

<i>Professor</i>	Dr. Milton Cohen
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<i>Office Hours</i>	M 12-1 PM, W 11:15 AM-12:00

**Course Description**

The politically turbulent 1930s—encompassing the Great Depression, the New Deal, the rise of Nazism and its seeming adversary, Soviet communism, and finally the coming of World War II—affected American writers deeply, turning most of them away from the modernist sensibility of the 1920s and towards a new political involvement with the Left.

This course will study various types and degrees of this political commitment in literature, from the panoramic social novel (Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*), leftist plays of Clifford Odets, political poetry of Muriel Rukeyser and others, to fusions of politics and race (Wright's *Native Son*) and politics and modernism (Dos Passos's *1919*). Besides Hemingway's novel on the Spanish Civil War, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, we'll look at how older modernists like Eliot, Stevens, Frost, Cummings, and Williams reacted to the new political environment.

Finally, we'll consider new literary genres of this decade:: documentary reportage, the proletarian novel (Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited*), government-sponsored arts projects (FSA photographs, the Federal Theatre and Writers Projects), and collaborations of writers and photographers. Malcolm Cowley's memoir provides a personal overview of the period.

**Required Texts**

Malcolm Cowley, *The Dream of the Golden Mountains: Remembering the 1930s*

Clifford Odets, *"Waiting for Lefty" and Other Plays*

Jack Conroy, *The Disinherited*

John Dos Passos, *1919*

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

Richard Wright, *Native Son* (unabridged edition)

Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

packet of readings (available only at Off-Campus Books)

### **Recommended text**

Milton A. Cohen, *Beleaguered Poets and Leftist Critics: Stevens, Frost, Cummings and Williams in the 1930s* (U. of Alabama Press, 2010)

### **Requirements**

Students will give an oral report lasting about 45 minutes (20% of grade) and write a research paper of about 15 pages (60%). Class participation is important and counts about 20% .

Early in the semester, students who have not taken my graduate courses previously should submit a one-page sample of their academic writing. All students should meet with me by the third week of the semester to discuss their oral reports and research projects.

### **Syllabus**

#### **Class Date Topics, Instructor, Readings**

1. 1/14 Introduction to course  
  
1/21 Martin Luther King day. No class
2. 1/28 **I. The Depression and The Writer's Changing Role: 1920-1931**  
Modernism and the end of the 1920s:  
Cowley, "Epilogue: New Year's Even," from *Exile's Return* (packet)  
  
The Depression: facts, photos, art (powerpoint presentation)  
Cowley, *Dream of the Golden Mountains*, chs. 1-3  
  
Secondary: Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, ch.1 (reserve)  
  
The Writers' Responsibility  
Edmund Wilson, "An Appeal to Progressives" *New Republic*, 1931.  
Secondary: Pells, 43-78, 151-69, (ch. 3 recommended) (reserve)
3. 2/04 **II. A New Genre: Documentary Reportage**  
Personal: Moorhead, "Broke at Fifty-five" (packet)  
Le Sueur, "Women on the Breadlines," (packet)  
Subjective: Agee. from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (packet)  
Panoramic: Wilson, "Detroit Motors," from *The American Jitters* (packet)  
Conversion experience: Le Sueur, "I Was Marching" (packet)

Secondary:

Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (reserve)

4. 2/11 Collaborations: photo and text  
Agee and Evans, from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (reserve)  
Lange and Taylor, *An American Exodus* (reserve)  
video: *Dorothea Lange: a visual life*  
Caldwell and Bourke-White, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (reserve)  
Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (reserve)

Secondary:

Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, chs. 14-15 (reserve),  
Pells, 194-201, 246-51 (reserve)  
Peeler, *Hope Among Us Yet*, 14-55, 57-65, 69 (reserve)  
Lange, *Photographs of a Lifetime* (reserve)  
Puckett, *5 Photo-Textual Documentaries of the Great Depression*, chs. 1-3, 6 (reserve)

5. 2/18 **III. Proletarian Literature**

Theory

Mike Gold, "Proletarian Realism," *New Masses*, Sept. 1930 (packet)  
V.F. Calverton, "Can We Have a Proletarian Literature," *Modern Quarterly*, 1932 (packet)  
Cowley, chs. 4-7, 9-15

The Proletarian Novel

Conroy, *The Disinherited*

Criticism

Mike Gold, "A Bourgeois Hamlet of Our Time," from *New Masses* (reserve)  
John Howard Lawson, "'Inner Conflict' and Proletarian Art," from *New Masses* (reserve)

Secondary:

Pells, 168-80, 202-19 (reserve)  
Recommended: Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (reserve)

6. 2/25 Leftist Theatre  
Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*  
-----, *Awake and Sing*  
Cowley, ch. 21, pp. 254-59

Secondary:

Pells, 252-63 (reserve)

The Group Theatre: Clurman, *The Fervent Years* (reserve)

The Workers' Theatre (paper on reserve)

7. 3/04 Modernism and Politics:

Dos Passos, *1919*

Margaret Macmillan, *1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (reserve)

Secondary:

Rosen, *John Dos Passos: Politics and the Writer* (reserve)

Pizer, *Dos Passos's U.S.A.: A Critical Study* (reserve)

3/11 Spring Break

8. 3/18 Leftist Poetry

poems by Rukeyser, Fearing, Roethke, Taggard (packet)

9. 3/25 Social Epic:

Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*

———, "The Harvest Gypsies: On the Road to *The Grapes of Wrath*"  
(reserve)

———, *Working Days: The Journals of The Grapes of Wrath* (reserve)

10. 4/01 Modernist poetic responses

poems by Cummings, Frost, Stevens, Williams, and Pound (packet)

Eliot, "Religion and Literature"

11. 4/08 Social Realism and Race

Wright, *Native Son*

Secondary:

Pells, 229-32 (reserve)

Puckett, ch. 5 (reserve)

Recommended: Kinamon, *The Emergence of Richard Wright* (reserve)

12. 4/15 The New Deal and the Arts

Cowley, pp. 177-87, Ch. 18

The WPA (powerpoint presentation)

The Federal Writers Project

*These Are Our Lives*, pp. 17-37, 235-52, 305-17 (reserve)

*Remembering America: A Sampler of WPA American Guide Series:*

Introduction, text (skim at random) (reserve)

Mangione, *The Dream and the Deal*, chs. 2, 4 (reserve)

The Farm Security Administration Photographs

Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade* (reserve)

*The Years of Bitterness and Pride* (reserve)

Horan, *The Desperate Years* (reserve)

Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream*, Ch. 4 (reserve)

The Federal Theatre Project

Flanagan, *Arena: History of the Federal Theatre* (reserve)

*Free, Adult and Uncensored* (reserve)

De Hart-Mathews, *The Federal Theatre* (reserve)

FRI 4/19? film: *The Cradle Will Rock*  
room TBA

13. 4/22 **V. Fascism, Spain and the Popular Front**

Hemingway, et al. *The Spanish Earth* (film excerpts)

Auden, "Spain, 1937" (packet)

Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

Writers Congresses

Josephson, "For a Literary United Front," (reserve)

Cowley, chs. 19-20, 23-24

Secondary:

Vernon, *Hemingway's Second War* (reserve)

Solow, "A Clash of Certainties Old and New: *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and the Inner War of Ernest Hemingway" (e-reserve)

14. 4/29 *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (continued)

**VI. Leftist disaffection and the Onset of WWII**

Auden, "September 1, 1939" (packet)

Jeffers, "May-June 1940" (packet)

Cowley, chs. 25-26

Hicks, letter to the editor of the *New Republic* ("On Leaving the Communist Party") (packet)  
Wright, in *The God That Failed* (reserve)

## **Course Policies**

### **Syllabus**

Items on the syllabus (due dates, readings, etc.) are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. I'll email you regarding last minute changes.

### **Oral Report**

The report should typically last about 45 minutes. I will hand out specific guidelines for it.

### **Research Paper**

The final paper typically should run about 15 pages. It may, but need not, be related to your oral report. Within the first weeks of the semester, I will want to confer with you about your topic.

### **Class Participation**

C.P. represents your active contribution to class discussion. Quality, not quantity, of contributions is what matters.

### **Attendance**

I do take attendance, and your cumulative absences affect your class participation grade (see above). Leaving after the break in a long class may result in an absence recorded for that class. If you know you must leave early, let me know at the beginning of class.

### **Tardiness**

Since class typically starts on time, if you come in late, you disturb not only the instructor and your classmates, but the "flow" of the lesson. Coming in late while a student is presenting an oral report is even more disturbing.

### **Secondary Research**

Required, of course, but it should never dominate your paper or control the discussion; your ideas should. Use s.r. to amplify your arguments, to provide contrasting views you will argue against, or (in your introduction) to suggest the range of critical opinion on your topic.

Consider the source's potential validity (and respectability): scholarly books and journal articles (whether in hard copy or on JSTOR) have been peer-reviewed and are therefore more reliable and usually more sophisticated than other material found on the internet (e.g., undocumented opinions from "enthusiast" websites).

Use quotation marks for all material taken directly from a secondary source. For both quoted material and for paraphrased material, **cite your source** parenthetically immediately after the quoted or paraphrased material, using author's last name (or abbreviated book title) and page number: "xxxxx" (Smith 40). At the end of your paper add a "Works Cited" page with complete bibliographical data. See the *MLA Handbook* for correct form.

### **Grading**

Typically, the final paper counts for about 60%, oral presentation and class participation about 40%, which means that to get an "A" in the course, your final paper must receive at least an "A-".

For UTD general policies, click on:

<http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>