

NEWBERRY SEMINAR: RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES

Fall 2016

Novel Action: Literature, Social Movements, and the Public Good

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Reform may be defined broadly as the effort by words and deeds to change and improve upon existing conditions. ~ Charles L. Sanford, 1958¹

SEMINAR DESCRIPTION

What is social reform? Who are reformers and what are their motivations? What is the relationship between “words and deeds,” literature and action? Beginning with readings from America’s “Age of Reform” and continuing through the Civil Rights Movement and contemporary reform efforts, this seminar explores the relationship between literary and social movements that address multiple systems of oppression and discrimination.

Incorporating both textual and sociological lenses, we will investigate reform literature and draw on social movement theories to explore and contextualize social action in its success and in its demise. Students will explore how literature operates as a form of civic engagement — often from within a larger movement — in response to inequities of gender, race, and class.

While literary analysis can assess literature’s function as a tool of social critique, sociology offers analysis of the context in which writing and social change take place. Using methodologies of both disciplines, students will interrogate the relationship between literature and social action and investigate the context for such action through the workings of historical and contemporary organizations.

Through shared readings, archival research, and visits to local organizations, students will research the challenges and constraints faced by individuals and groups seeking social change; the rhetoric used by individual authors and by organizations; and the role of literature in reform movements, including readers’ reactions to works that expose social ills. By connecting literature to context and to practice, students will investigate the complex web among writers, communities, social issues, and social change and will embark upon their own research projects as acts of civic engagement.

¹ Sanford, C. L. (1958). Classics in American Reform Literature. *American Quarterly*, 295-311.

Chicago offers an exemplary case study for social reform and the relationship between literary and social movements. Chicago-based writers as diverse as Jane Addams, Upton Sinclair, and Lorraine Hansberry were members of both political movements and writers' groups that viewed artistic production as integral to civic struggle. Chicago's long history of social change also makes it an ideal setting for experiential learning, allowing us to visit historic sites such as Hull House, Pullman, and contemporary neighborhoods where activists are working for social change. The topics explored in the seminar will inspire student projects that can move beyond Progressive-era Chicago through related Newberry holdings on other time periods and locations.

This seminar operates at the intersection of literature, social movements, and the public humanities and will draw on the Newberry's vast holdings on social action, clubs and organizations, literary manuscripts, and the library's own history. Our focus on the relationship between literature and society will raise questions of the social function of writing — questions that can lead students to an appreciation of the Newberry's contributions to the public good and how their own projects can contribute to the public humanities.

The Newberry Library provides the perfect setting for exploring how literature contributes to the public good, and our students will explore the Newberry's mission, how and why its holdings developed as they did, and how the library developed within and responded to its social context. Not only will students engage in broader public discourse through participation in some of the Newberry's events such as seminars or literary walking tours, they will share their own research in a way that promotes civically-engaged scholarship with the broader public.

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

Note: This syllabus is subject to change as planning by seminar faculty continues.

Week One

The first week of the course will introduce students to the various lenses we will use throughout the semester. Using the Newberry itself as a model, students will be introduced to the relationships among public discourse, literature, research, and social action. Readings will focus on the public humanities, social movement theories, and reform literature as a genre. Orientation sessions with librarians will also occur.

Introduction to:

- The Newberry collections and the methods of archival research with the Newberry staff
- The Newberry's mission and history
- Course concepts and historical background: the Age of Reform and the Novel of Purpose
- Social Movement Theory
- Methods of literary analysis, historical sociological analysis, archival research, and experiential learning

Secondary Readings:

- Klandermans and Roggeband, *Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines*
- Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*
- Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World*
- Downs, *Books that Changed the World*

Primary Readings:

- Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (excerpts, as introduction to tropes of the reform novel)

Collections:

- Blatchford Family Papers and E.W. Blatchford Papers (founding trustee's work on the Newberry and with related Chicago organizations)
- William Stetson Merrill Papers (superintendent of Newberry; reminiscences on Newberry public services)
- Newberry Records (publications relating to establishment, growth, participation in city and nation)
- Copelin Commercial Photographs (historical photos of the Newberry and its surrounding neighborhood)
- Dill Pickle Club Papers (literary and activist organization in the Newberry's Bohemian neighborhood)

Visits:

- Walking tours (using Newberry podcasts currently being created) of prominent sites related to literary culture and social activism

Weeks Two and Three

Using the work of Jane Addams and the Hull House as an entrée to discussing social action, we will provide students with an extensive foundation for both the content of the course and the research process.

This unit will emphasize issues of social inequality, immigration, and social reform. Students will gain practice using archival material by exploring the papers of Graham Taylor, founder of the Chicago Commons Settlement, a counterpart to Addams. Students will also read some works by Edith Franklin Wyatt, a writer and activist of the Chicago Commons, to begin formulating ideas about the relationship between an organization's social activity and its artistic production.

Using the works of these two social reformers, Addams and Taylor, as examples, students will gain practice in literary criticism, social movements theory, and historical research methods and will have the opportunity to begin the research process with a document analysis assignment.

Case Study:

- Chicago settlement movements
- The importance of place and concepts of home
- Immigration as it relates to inequality, labor, and sense of place

Secondary Readings:

- MacLean and Williams, "'Ghosts of Sociologies Past:' Settlement Sociology in the Progressive Era at the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy"
- Lengermann, Madoo, and Niebrugge-Brantley, "Back to the Future: Settlement Sociology, 1885-1930"
- Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life*
- Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*

Primary Readings:

- Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* and related writings
- Addams, *Hull-House Maps and Papers*
- Wyatt, plays, stories, and essays, including "Notes on the Society of Midland Authors" (Addams was a member)

Collections:

- Graham Taylor papers: social economist and philanthropist who founded Chicago Commons Settlement and worked on housing and child welfare issues
- Edith Franklin Wyatt papers (writer and resident of Chicago Commons Settlement)
- Maps of late 19th Century Chicago

Visits:

- Hull House

Writing Assignment:

- Document Analysis: will give students practice in dealing with primary material. They will learn the skills necessary to attempt to reconstruct the past from residues, to assess the evidentiary status of different types of documents, to analyze the rhetorical conventions that shape the public record, and to determine the range of permissible inferences and explanations.

Weeks Four and Five

Combining Chicago's rich labor-related history with Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, this unit explores social class and labor movements and investigates the ways in which writers and their publishers framed social problems in fiction. Sinclair's edited anthology, *The Cry for Justice: an Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest; the Writings of Philosophers, Poets, Novelists, Social Reformers, and Others who have Voiced the Struggle Against Social Injustice*, will also show students how writers like Sinclair conceived the place of literature in the work of reform. Secondary readings will provide context for discussing issues of socio-

economic class from the nineteenth century to the present. Using the Newberry's map "The Labor Trail: Chicago's History of Working-Class Life and Struggle," we will 'take to the streets' to experience important locations of socio-economic class struggle. Visits with local union leaders and activists in the Occupy movement will complement the historical work. Students will conduct a second document analysis, this time devoted to preliminary topics for their independent research projects.

Case Study:

- Historical and Contemporary Labor Movements
- Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and the literature of social protest

Secondary Readings:

- Shrager Lang, *The Syntax of Class: Writing Inequality in Nineteenth-Century America*
- Braverman, *Monopoly and Capital* for a foundational discussion of the relations between capital and labor
- Milkman, *Farewell to the Factory*
- Clawson, *The Next Upsurge* on contemporary labor movements
- Buhle and Buhle, *It Started in Wisconsin* on the Occupy movement

Primary Readings:

- Sinclair, *The Jungle: A Story of Chicago* (multiple editions) and *The Cry for Justice: an Anthology of the Literature of Social Protest*

Collections (Due to the rich nature of the Newberry's collection on labor, we will select from the following):

- "Labor Trail" resource
- Wobblies papers in Franklin and Penelope Rosemont Collection
- Carolyn Ashbaugh papers (IL labor historical society)
- Carroll Binder papers (labor reporter)
- Charles H. Kerr Company papers (oldest labor and socialist publishing house); Allen Ruff papers (book on Kerr Co.)
- Jack Conroy papers (labor writings; collection of labor magazines)
- Douglas Wixton papers (Conroy's biographer)
- Floyd Dell papers (correspondence with Sinclair)
- Pullman papers on unions and strikes

Visits:

- Sites from the "Labor Trail"
- Haymarket Memorial
- Organizations working on contemporary workers' issues
- Pullman

Writing Assignment:

- Document Analysis, Revisited: students, working with instructors and the Newberry staff, will seek a document they may be interested in for their independent projects;

they will research secondary sources related to the document to flesh out the conclusions and inferences suggested by the primary document.

Week Six

This unit explores issues of racial inequality and social action related to city housing. We will investigate the ways in which racial segregation is embedded in the structure of cities and promoted through public policies but also challenged through social movements by individuals and organizations. To this end we will tour neighborhoods and meet with activists working to provide affordable and safe housing to underserved populations.

Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* will provide the starting point for our investigation. Collections such as the Mark J. Satter papers and African-American newspapers will allow us to contextualize Hansberry's work. Students will conduct a Text and Context assignment that connects secondary historical or sociological literature to one of the semester's literary readings.

Case Study:

- Racial Inequality and Housing
- Lorraine Hansberry, NAACP, and issues of segregation
- Chicago community development issues surrounding housing

Secondary Readings:

- Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side*
- Gordon, 'Somewhat like War': The Aesthetics of Segregation, Black Liberation, and *A Raisin in the Sun*"

Primary Readings:

- Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
- Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville*
- Patillo, *Black on the Block*
- Satter, *Family Properties: How the Struggle Over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America*

Collections:

- Mark J. Satter papers (attorney who worked on race and real estate issues)
- Collections of African-American Newspapers
- Victor Lawson Papers (Chicago Commission on Race Relations, housing reports)
- Chicago Neighborhoods Collections
- Maps of Chicago revisited
- Bronzeville exhibit

Visits:

- Tours of Chicago neighborhoods

- Organizations working on contemporary housing issues like Metropolitan Tenants Organization, Lawndale Christian Development Corporation, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, and Shriver Poverty Law Center

Writing Assignments:

- Text and Context: students will seek secondary sources in history or sociology related to one of our main pieces of literature and will write short papers in which they discuss how the secondary source helps them understand and contextualize the literature
- Mini-literature reviews to increase the entire class's knowledge on topics related to potential independent project foci

Weeks Seven and Beyond

During the second half of the semester, we will regularly meet with students individually and in writing groups as they embark on their independent projects. We may assign brief readings on the public humanities as we encourage students to contemplate the impact of their research. Attendance at relevant Newberry Seminars or other cultural/intellectual lectures will be required as appropriate.

ACM POLICY ON ACADEMICS

A complete listing of ACM policies can be found in your student handbook.

Class attendance and participation: You are expected to attend and participate fully in all classroom sessions, site visits, and field trips.

Academic honesty: Actions of dishonesty are destructive to the well-being of the academic community, and ACM staff respond to them vigorously. Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic theft will result in a failing grade for that assignment and may result in failure for the course.

ACM POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Associated Colleges of the Midwest does not discriminate in the operation of its educational programs, activities, or employment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, color, religion, national origin, age, veteran status, marital status, or disability.