

Veranstalter	Prof. Susanne Rohr
Thema	The Red Decade [AA-V4a/b, ENG-13, AA-M14, AA-M15, AA-M16, AA-MA1, AA-MA2, AA-MA5, AA-W, SLM-WB]
Art der Veranstaltung	Seminar II
Veranstaltungsnummer	53-563
Zeit	Mi. 12-14
Raum	Phil 1250
Beginn	15.10.2014

Course description:

There is a period in American culture that has a somewhat dubious reputation: the 1930s, also known as “The Red Decade,” a historical moment (in)famous for being open to leftist ideas. Looking back, we find a conflicting decade: on the one hand, the 1930s saw a pronounced growth of mass culture with the Golden Age of both radio and Hollywood, on the other hand the 1930s were a decade of political turmoil and economic problems, with the Western world suffering through a major economic depression. In the US, Franklin D. Roosevelt launched his “New Deal,” a multitude of social programs geared at alleviating the worst effects of the economic crisis. A number of American artists felt inspired to tackle the reality of vast social problems arising from unemployment, poverty and crop failure due to severe drought, some working in connection with Roosevelt’s Federal Art Project. In the context of this difficult economic and social situation, a number of artworks in various media emerged in the US, including photography, drama and fiction, some produced from a decidedly leftist or socialist perspective. As “art with a message” is often deemed aesthetically second-rate, the cultural production of this decade is often neglected in academic reflection. On the other hand, masterpieces by William Faulkner or Ernest Hemingway appeared that were instantly recognized as such on a world-wide scale.

In the seminar, we will examine a wide array of artworks – photography, fine arts, fiction, a crime novel and children’s literature – and inquire into their particular concerns and aesthetics. I am confident that we will come to a profound appraisal of the artworks in question and dismantle the accusation of their ideological format – as purely ideological.

The textual material will include:

Novels:

Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, 1930 (213 p)

William Faulkner, *Light in August*, 1932

Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*, 1935

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937 (184 p)

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1939 (476 p)

Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust*, 1939 (126 p)

Photography:

James Agee/Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 1941

Credit requirements:

Regular attendance, oral presentation/group work/expert groups (to be determined), term paper of 15-20 pages length.

Introductory text:

Malcolm Bradbury, “Realism and Surrealism: The 1930s.” *The Modern American Novel*. 2nd ed. New York: Penguin, 1992. 123-157.

Sprechstunde während der Vorlesungszeit:	Montag, 14-15 in Phil 1256
Sprechstunde während der Semesterferien:	siehe Aushang