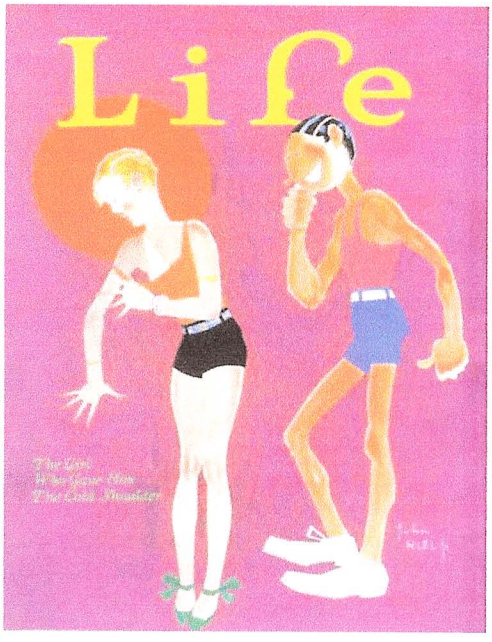

AMERICAN CULTURAL PERIODS: 1920s
American Studies 360A
Learning Center 308

Professor M. C. Lynn
Spring 2008
T, Th, 2:10-3:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
An intensive examination of the "roaring twenties," with special attention to the impact of class, race, and gender on the development of American culture in the period. Focusing on a series of controversies illuminating some of the conflicting forces at work in American society, including debates over immigration, race, Prohibition, evolution, sexuality, and the role of women in society, the course will examine some of the major intellectual, social, and cultural issues of the era.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Edward Larsen, Summer for the Gods
David Levering Lewis, When Harlem Was In Vogue
Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt
Nathan Miller, New World Coming
photocopied material
selected novels (see attached list)

FILMS (excerpts)
"Lowell Thomas Remembers: The Roaring Twenties"
"The Jazz Singer"
"Sacco and Vanzetti"
"Inherit the Wind"

FINDING ME

My office is Learning Center 329; my extension is 5025. (Messages can be left at the American Studies office, extension 5021.) I check my e-mail daily; my username is mcl. My office hours are on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 11:00 a.m. to noon and from 3:30 to 4:30, and on Wednesdays from 11:30 to 12:30. If you have classes at these times, please talk to me to arrange another time, as I am normally on campus all day Monday through Friday. (In an emergency, you can reach me at home at 587-0193.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Regular class attendance, on-time completion of assigned readings, and informed participation in class discussion. Thoughtful contributions to the class e-mail discussion list (AM360A-list) can substitute for contributions to class discussion, but not for class attendance. Your class work will be graded, and will constitute approximately 15% of your final grade; more than three absences, for whatever reason, will have a negative impact on that grade.

2. Research project: a ten to fifteen page interdisciplinary analysis of some aspect of American culture in the 1920s, based on primary and secondary sources, due in class on March 22. A one paragraph topic statement is due on February 5; a preliminary bibliography is due on February 12; an outline is due on February 21; the rough draft is due on February 28 and the final draft is due on March 22.

The key to an effective research paper is often receiving helpful feedback on the first draft, so one-third of your grade on this paper will be earned for that draft, which will be due in class on Thursday, February 28. I will meet with you to go over your rough draft between the 28th and March 6 . You will then have until Thursday, March 22 to revise your rough draft and complete the final version of the paper. No electronic submissions please. And late submissions—including late submission of the rough draft will be penalized by a grade reduction. Your grade on this paper will constitute about 40% of your final grade.

3. Oral presentations: a fifteen minute oral report with an accompanying 2-3 page handout on one specific year in the decade of the nineteen twenties; this report will summarize and illustrate the major events of that year and their significance in the development of American culture. (For purposes of this assignment, the 1920s begin in 1918 and end in 1930.) Years will be chosen during the first class session; the first report will be on January 31. The report will constitute about 15% of your final grade.

4. Book review: to explore the great literary creativity of this decade, you will choose and read one of the important works of fiction published during the decade and write and deliver a review which places the book in the cultural context of the period Reviews will be delivered in class between April 1 and April 10. Your oral report should include a brief synopsis of the plot, a concise biographical sketch of the author, a summary of the relevant criticism (including both reviews from the 20s and analyses from more recent scholarship) as well as your own analysis of the novel; the each report will be accompanied by a written version 3-4 pp. long. The review will constitute about 15% of your final grade.

5. Final paper: in the last two weeks of the class you will prepare an evaluative essay exploring what you have learned about the 1920s in this class; I will also encourage more innovative and creative ways to demonstrate your understanding, such as exhibits, performances, web-sites, works of art, etc. This final effort will account for approximately 15% of your final grade.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

According to the Dean of Studies website, "Skidmore not only promotes intellectual honesty vigorously but severely punishes such offenses as plagiarism and cheating on exams."
http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean_of_studies/integrity/index.cfm (1/8/08)
If you use someone else's ideas or words without properly citing them, you are committing plagiarism—the academic equivalent of theft. If you quote more than three consecutive words from someone else's work, you must put those words in quotation marks and properly footnote them. If you paraphrase someone else's words, or use their ideas, you need to carefully footnote your borrowing. If you borrow from a website (see above) you need to put the borrowed language in quotation marks, include the url for the appropriate page, and indicate the date you visited the page in question. If you fail to do this, you may receive a failing grade on your paper; if your offense is severe you may fail the course.

American Studies papers generally require bibliographies of all works consulted (as opposed to works cited) and use footnotes rather than in-text citations; please visit the department web page to see how to do this—here is the url:
http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/american_studies/writingapaper-footnoting.html
If you have any questions about how to use footnotes (or endnotes) I will be happy to work with you to show you how to show your sources properly. One exception to this footnote policy is in book reviews (see below) where the only quotes and paraphrases are from the book you are reviewing. In that one case, you may use in-text citations—simply list the author's surname and the page you are quoting. If, however, you decide to quote other reviews of the book, or other texts which are relevant, you should use the standard footnote formula.

The Dean of Studies webpage includes explicit about the ethics of academic integrity at: http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean_of_studies/integrity/ethics.cfm

The same website includes this useful checklist to be used before turning in a paper or essay:
http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean_of_studies/integrity/checklist.cfm

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Monday, January 21 **Martin Luther King Day lecture: Dr. Claudia Highbauh "reflections on the Movement" 7pm Gannett. (Please make an effort to attend this event as race is one of the important topics of our class, and her comments will be relevant to our discussions.)**

PART ONE: INTOLERANCE

Tuesday, January 22 — Introduction: Red Scare: "Sacco & Vanzetti" (film)
Thursday, January 24 — Ending War and Domestic Terror: Miller, pp. 1-60

Monday, January 28 **Patrice O'Neill, "Not in Our Town" lecture & film, 7:30 pm Gannett. (This well reviewed film and interesting speaker will also, like Dean Highbaugh's presentation on the 21st, serve as helpful background for our discussions of race in America during the 1920s. Please plan to attend.)**

Tuesday, January 29 — Normalcy and Corruption: Miller, pp. 61-104
BEGIN CHOOSING PAPER TOPIC

Thursday, January 31 — Scandal and Coolidge: Miller, pp. 105-140
Oral report, 1918

Tuesday, February 5 — KKK, Murder, & the election of 1924: Miller, pp. 141-170
PAPER TOPIC DUE
Oral report: 1919

Thursday, February 7 — BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION SESSION:
MEET IN LIBRARY BI ROOM
(at the right of the main entrance)

PART TWO: POPULAR CULTURE

Tuesday, February 12 — Popular Culture and the Arts: Miller, pp. 171-225
BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE
Oral report: 1920

Thursday, February 14 — Religion, Feminism, & Vamps: Miller, pp. 226-271
Oral report:1921

Tuesday, February 19 — Legal & Illegal Industries: Miller, pp. 273-316
Oral report: 1922

Thursday, February 21 — Lucky Lindy & Herbert Hoover: Miller, pp. 317-363
OUTLINE DUE
Oral report: 1923

Tuesday, February 26 — The Crash: Miller, pp. 365-389
Oral report: 1924

Thursday, February 28 — Middle Class America: Lewis, *Babbitt*, ch. 1-8
ROUGH DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE
Oral report: 1925

CONFERENCES ON ROUGH DRAFTS 2/29-3/6

Tuesday, March 4 — The Business of America: Lewis, *Babbitt*, ch. 9-20
Oral report: 1926

Thursday, March 6 — Revolution in Morals: *Babbitt*, ch. 21-34

SPRING BREAK

PART THREE: SCIENCE & FAITH

Tuesday, March 18 — Background for Battle: Larson, ch. 1-3
Oral report 1927

Thursday, March 22 — "Inherit the Wind" (film)
FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE

Tuesday, March 25 — Battle is Joined: Larson, ch. 4-5
Oral report 1928

Thursday, March 27 — The Trial Begins: Larson, ch. 6-7
Oral report: 1929

Tuesday, April 1 — Consequences: Larson, ch. 8-10
Oral report 1930

PART FOUR: RACE & RENAISSANCE

Thursday, April 3 — Peace, Migration, & the Talented Tenth: Lewis, ch. 1-2
Book reviews: Toomer, McKay, Dos Passos

Tuesday, April 8 — The New Negro: Lewis, ch. 3-4
Book reviews: Heyward, Larsen, Wharton

Thursday, April 10 — Harlem as Paris: Lewis, ch. 5-6
Book reviews: Yezierska, Dreiser

Tuesday, April 15 — Depression: Lewis, ch. 7-9
Book reviews: Faulkner, Cather

PART FIVE: MORE POPULAR CULTURE

Thursday, April 17 — All That Jazz (TBA)
Book reviews: Loos, Hammett,

Tuesday, April 22 — Hooray for Hollywood (TBA)
Book reviews: Hemingway, Fitzgerald

CONCLUSION

Thursday, April 24 — Looking Backward: Fitzgerald, Evans, Allen (photocopies)

Tuesday, April 29 — Lessons from the Decade: FINAL PAPER DUE

Selected Fiction from the 1920s

(you may choose other texts if you clear them with me in advance)

Fitzgerald, THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE DAMNED
Hemingway, FAREWELL TO ARMS,
Yezierska, THE BREAD GIVERS
Dos Passos, 1919
Dreiser, AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY
Jean Toomer, CANE
Heyward, PORGY
Larsen, PASSING
Cather, ONE OF OURS
Loos, GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES
Faulkner, THE SOUND AND THE FURY
Hammett, THE MALTESE FALCON
McKay, HOME TO HARLEM
Wharton, AGE OF INNOCENCE

Other resources: The periodical collection of the Scribner Library (on the ground floor—both bound volumes and microfilms—is a treasury of primary sources from the period. Magazines of particular interest include the *Literary Digest, Harper's, the Ladies Home Journal, Atlantic Monthly, the Independent, American Mercury, Nation, New Republic, Scribner's, Saturday Review of Literature,* and *Century* magazine.

There are many web pages devoted to the twenties—some focusing on a particular individual or event, others providing broader overviews of the period. Some are terrific, while others are disappointing; we will talk about how to separate the former from the latter.

Putting Together An Effective "Year Report"

Begin with one of the many "timeline" websites or books, which list what somebody thinks are the major events of a particular year. Try not to use one put up by a fifth grade class—Wikipedia is not half bad as a source for this sort of topic, but it is very broad.The books tend to be better than the websites, as you can imagine. I have, in my office, a copy of the Timelines of American History, which covers the main events in politics, science, the arts, etc. But these timelines don't give you too much help in figuring out what the really important events of the year were—they include lots of (amusing) junk. There are two videotapes in the American Studies office which are drawn from newsreels of the period; once you have checked the timelines you should view the tape for your year.

The timelines and videos are intended only as a starting point. You will hardly have time to cover all the events of your year, and you must pick and choose which events are the most important, interesting, and influential. (Remember that you may use a handout to distribute information that you don't have time to present in class.) What did people in the twenties think were the most important events of the period? One place to look is in the special year-end issues of newspapers and magazines, where reporters and editors listed what they say as the main events of the year. There is often a major difference between the things people at the time thought were important and the things we, with the advantages of hindsight, think were the "main" events of a decade; this means you will probably want to consult a good history of the 1920s. (I have some, and there are more in the library.) Remember your goal is to teach the rest of us about your year—what do we most need to know?

Once you have identified six or seven aspects of your year that you consider to be crucial for the rest of us to know, put your report together. You should present a brief introduction summarizing what you are going to tell us about your year. Then describe the events of the year, and finish your report with a brief conclusion in which you consider the significance of what you have told us. Don't forget to pass out your handouts, which should list the sources you have consulted.

Final advice: visual aids can include brief video clips, photocopies, or transparencies to use on the overhead projector. (Nancy Osberg-Otrembiak, our department secretary can make transparencies for you—but please give her 24 hours notice.) You may use Powerpoint for your presentation, but beware of simply putting on the screen the words you are speaking to us. (Be prepared for a computer crash with a backup plan, like transparencies, posters, or even chalk on the blackboard.) Look at your audience, not at your notes; try to put expression in your voice. Rehearse at least twice so that you do not use up your ten minutes with only half your report. (If you've not done this kind of presentation before, please come and see me before you do the report)