

**20th-Century American Bestsellers**  
**ENG 147B**  
**Spring 2014 Syllabus**

**Assignments:**

Students will be required to submit a series of assignments into the bestsellers database during the semester, focused on a single best-seller (chosen from the lists of bestsellers by decade, above, but not a book that has already been chosen by someone else, nor any of the required readings for the course). These assignments will comprise a bibliographical description of a first edition, a publication history (including performances in other media, if any), a biographical sketch of the author, a reception history, and a critical analysis of the work in its cultural and literary contexts. All of these assignments will be submitted online, using Web-based submission forms: they will become part of an ongoing project to compile a Web-accessible database of information about bestselling 20th-century American literature.

For each database assignment, students must also submit a list of the sources consulted in completing each subsection of that assignment, and indicate whether or not the source produced information. This complete list of sources should be submitted in LATTE. Please also include the names of sources that produced information for a particular assignment in the database submission for that assignment as well.

In addition to the database assignments, students will work in small groups to present each of the books that we read in common. These presentations must provide an overview of the following:

1. History and cultural significance of the book's publisher
2. Analysis of how this book relates to the theme that connects all the books we read in common, and what it tells us about that aspect of American culture and current events at the time of its publication
3. Points of connection on the fiction or non-fiction lists around the same time

Presentations may also include:

1. Highlights or oddities of the book's publication history
2. Highlights or oddities of the book's reception
3. Highlights or oddities of the author's biography

**Schedule:**

Assignment    *(percentage of semester grade)*

Due Dates

Bibliographic Description *(10%)*

January 28<sup>th</sup>

Help documentation: <http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a1help.html>

|   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Publication History (15%)   | February 11th                   |
| Help documentation: <a href="http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a2help.html">http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a2help.html</a> |                                 |
| Midterm (10%)   | February 25th                   |
| Biographical Sketch (10%)   | March 4 <sup>th</sup>           |
| Help documentation: <a href="http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a3help.html">http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a3help.html</a> |                                 |
| Reception History (10%)   | April 18th                      |
| Help documentation: <a href="http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a4help.html">http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a4help.html</a> |                                 |
| Essay (25%)   | April 24th                      |
| Help documentation: <a href="http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a5help.html">http://unsworth.unet.brandeis.edu/courses/bestsellers/a5help.html</a> |                                 |
| Final Exam (10%)  | May 5th                         |
| Group presentation of assigned reading (10%)  | Dates and groups to be assigned |

### **Readings: Bestsellers and the American Class System**

#### **Required:**

Upton Sinclair, The Jungle (1906). New York, NY: Penguin, 2006.\*  
 Eleanor Porter, Polyanna (1914). New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2011.  
 Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (1923). Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003.\*  
 Lillian Smith, Strange Fruit (1944). San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace/Harvest, 1992.  
 Edna Ferber, Giant (1952). New York, NY: HarperCollins/Perennial, 2000.\*\*  
 E.L. Doctorow, Ragtime (1975). New York, NY: Random House, 2007.\*\*

#### **On Reserve:**

Gordon Hutner, What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel, 1920-1960. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.\*\*  
 Cathy Davidson, Revolution and the word: the rise of the novel in America. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 2004.  
 Leslie Fiedler, What Was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1982.  
 Alice Hackett, 60 Years of Bestsellers: 1895-1955. New York, NY: Bowker, 1957.  
 Brian Hill and Dee Power, The making of a bestseller: success stories from authors and the editors, agents, and booksellers behind them. Chicago, IL: Dearborn, 2005.  
 Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes: The Story of Bestsellers in the United States. New York, NY: MacMillan, 1947.  
 Radway, Janice, A feeling for books : the Book-of-the-Month Club, literary taste, and middle-class desire. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

John William Tebbel, Between Covers: The Rise and Transformation of American Book Publishing. New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1987. (used copies or reserve reading only)

John William Tebbel, A History of Book Publishing in the United States vol. 1-4. New York, R. R. Bowker Co. 1972-1981.

**Available in Latte:**

Critical essays (both required and optional) will be available for download from Latte.

\*also available as a free ebook from Project Gutenberg and other sources

\*\*also available as a Kindle ebook

**Week 1: Orientation to the course**

*Required:*

Wikipedia entry on Bestsellers

"A Guide to Best Sellers." 70 Years of Best Sellers. New York: Bowker, 1967, 1-8.

"Introduction: The Nature and Purpose of Bibliography." A New Introduction to Bibliography. New Castle, DE: 1995, 1-2.

"The Best-Seller List as Marketing Tool and Historical Fiction," Book History, Vol. 3 (2000), pp. 286-304.

"Introduction," What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel 1920-1960. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. 1-36.

"Black Authors Rarely Have Made the Best-Seller List," a review of Michael Korda, Making the List: A Cultural History of the American Bestseller 1900-1999 in The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, No. 34 (Winter, 2001-2002), pp. 128-130.

*Recommended:*

Woodcock, "Books as Literature vs. Books as Commodity," *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Spring, 1982), 240-250.

John Unsworth, "The Book Market II," in *The Columbia History of The American Novel*. New York: Columbia UP, 1991.

Barry Targan, "Where Does Fiction Go?" *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 112, No. 2 (Spring, 2004), 256-267.

On Reserve: John Tebbel, "A General View of Book Publishing, 1919-1940." *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume III, The Golden Age Between Two Wars, 1920-1940*. New York: Bowker, 1978. 3-10.

On Reserve: John Tebbel, "Appendix A: An Economic Review of Book Publishing, 1915-1945." *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume III, The Golden Age Between Two Wars, 1920-1940*. New York: Bowker, 1978. 657-690.

**Week 2: Upton Sinclair, The Jungle (1906)**

*Required:*

Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*

Philip Gaskell, "Bibliographical Description: Purpose and Scope." *A New Introduction to Bibliography*. New Castle, DE: 1995, 321-335.

### **Week 3: Readings**

Database Assignment 1 due

#### *Required:*

Roediger, D. (1989). Review of "The Lost First Edition of Upton Sinclair's The Jungle." Midwest Quarterly, 31: 138-139.

Barrett, J. R. (2006). "Remembering The Jungle (1906)." Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas 3(4): 7-12.

Hussey, M. (2009). "Global muckraking: the international impact of Upton Sinclair's The Jungle." Teaching History: A Journal of Methods 34(1): 29.

Wade, L. C. (1991). "The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair's The Jungle." American Studies 32(2): 79-101.

Wilson, Christopher. "The Making of a Bestseller, 1906." *New York Times*, Dec 22, 1985; Book Review pp. 1, 25, 27. Downloaded from ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009).

#### *Recommended:*

Simons, A. M. (1910). *Wasting human life*, Chicago: Socialist Party of the United States. "A Portfolio of Upton Sinclair Photographs," *Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (Winter 1974).

#### *Resources for Database Assignment 1*

Typefaces presented as a Periodic Table File

Good examples of Assignment 1

G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Treatment of Typesetting and Presswork in Bibliographical Description," *Studies in Bibliography*, Vol. 52 (1999), pp. 1-57.

### **Week 4: Eleanor Porter, Pollyanna (1914)**

#### *Required:*

Eleanor Porter, *Pollyanna*

[Bestsellers DB Entry on Pollyanna](#)

### **Week 5: Readings**

Database Assignment 2 due

#### *Required:*

Frank Luther Mott. "The Family Novel in the New Century." *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States*. New York: MacMillan, 1947. 215-223.

- Samuel Hopkins Adams, "Apollyon vs. Pollyanna," in *The Novel of Tomorrow and the Scope of Fiction*, by Twelve American Novelists, The New Republic/Bobbs Merrill, 1922.
- Alice Mills, "Pollyanna and the Not So Glad Game," *Children's Literature*, Volume 27, 1999, pp. 87-104.
- Chapter 14, "Kissing Cinderella Goodbye: Unfairytale Elements in *Pollyanna* and *Anne of Green Gables*," from John Seelye, *Jane Eyre's American Daughters: From The Wide Wide World to Anne of Green Gables; A Study of Marginalized Maidens and What They Mean*. Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 2005.
- Chapter 7, "Pollyanna and Anxious Individualism," from Joe Sutliff Sanders, *Disciplining Girls: Understanding the Origins of the Classic Orphan Girl Story*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010.

*Recommended:*

Pollyanna: The Board Game (1915)

<http://www.boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/2561/pollyanna>

"Pollyanna, the glad girl; a four act comedy," by Catherine Chisholm Cushing, founded upon "Pollyanna": the glad book ... by Eleanor H. Porter. New York, Klaw & Erlanger, 1915. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t49p3wx8f>

**Midterm Recess (February 17-21)**

**Week 6: Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* (1923)**

Take-home Midterm due Feb. 25 in class

*Required:*

Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt*

[Bestsellers DB Entry on Babbitt](#)

**Week 7: Readings**

Database Assignment 3 due

*Required:*

James M. Hutchisson, "All of Us Americans at 46": The Making of Sinclair Lewis' "Babbitt," *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter, 1992), pp. 95-114.

Matthew J. Bruccoli, "Textual Variants in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*", *Studies in Bibliography*, Vol. 11 (1958), pp. 263-268.

Michael Augspurger, "Sinclair Lewis' Primers for the Professional Managerial Class: *Babbitt*, Arrowsmith, and *Dodsworth*" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Spring, 2001), 73-97.

William H. Simon, "Babbitt v. Brandeis: The Decline of the Professional Ideal," *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 37.

*Resources for Database Assignment 3*  
Good examples of Assignment 3

**Week 8: Lillian Smith, Strange Fruit (1944)**

*Required:*

Lillian Smith, *Strange Fruit*

[Bestsellers DB Entry on Strange Fruit](#)

**Week 9: Readings**

Database Assignment 4 due

*Required:*

Clayton, Bruce. "Lillian Smith (1897-1966)." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. 23 August 2013. Web. 11 January 2014.

Inscoe, John C. "Killers of the Dream." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. 22 August 2013. Web. 11 January 2014.

Edwin Berry Burgum, "The Sociological Pattern of Strange Fruit" *Science & Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Winter, 1945), 77-82.

Garcia, J. (2008). "Race, empire, and humanism in the work of Lillian Smith." *Radical History Review*(101): 59-80.

On Reserve: John Tebbel, "Censorship in the Forties." *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume IV, The Great Change, 1940-1980*. New York: Bowker, 1981. 695-704.

*Recommended:*

Lillian Smith, "The Artist and the Dream," *Phylon* (1940-1956), Vol. 9, No. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1948), 232-233.

Belton, D. (1983) "Lillian Smith: Walking a Trembling Earth." *Hollins Critic* 20(3): 1-12.

Johnson, Cheryl L. "The Language of Sexuality and Silence in Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit*." *Signs*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 1-22.

*Resources for Database Assignment 4*

Good examples of Assignment 4

**Week 10: Edna Ferber, Giant (1952)**

*Required:*

Edna Ferber, *Giant*

[Bestsellers DB Entry on Giant](#)

**Week 11: Readings**

*Required:*

- Bebout, L. (2011). "Troubling White Benevolence: Four Takes on a Scene from Giant." MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S. 36(3): 13-36.
- Shapiro, A. R. (2002). "Edna Ferber, Jewish American feminist." Shofar: 52-60.
- Smyth, J. E. (2007). "Jim Crow, Jett Rink, and James Dean: reconstructing Ferber's Giant (1952-1956)." American Studies 48(3): 5-27.
- Nickles, S. (2002). "More is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Postwar America." American Quarterly 54(4): 581-622.

*Recommended:*

- Horowitz, S. P. and M. J. Landsman (1982). "The Americanization of Edna: A Study of Ms Ferber's Jewish American Identity." Studies in American Jewish Literature 1982: 69-80.
- Shapiro, A. (2008). "When Edna Ferber Was Accused of Communist Propaganda." Studies in American Jewish Literature 27: 16-22.

**Week 12: EL Doctorow, Ragtime (1975)**

*Required:*

EL Doctorow, *Ragtime*

[Bestsellers DB Entry on Ragtime](#)

**Passover and Spring Recess (April 15-22)**

**Week 13: Readings**

Database Assignment 5 due

*Required:*

- On Reserve: John Tebbel, "Publishing in the Seventies." A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume IV, The Great Change, 1940-1980. New York: Bowker, 1981. 721-745.
- Chute, H. (2008). "Ragtime, Kavalier & Clay, and the Framing of Comics." MFS: Modern Fiction Studies 54(2): 268-301.
- Cooper, S. (1993). "Cutting Both Ways: E. L. Doctorow's Critique of the Left." South Atlantic Review 58(2): 111-125.
- Roberts, B. (2004). "Blackface Minstrelsy and Jewish Identity: Fleshing Out Ragtime as the Central Metaphor in E. L. Doctorow's Ragtime." Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction 45(3): 247-259.
- Kurth-Voigt, L. E. (1977). "Kleistian Overtones in E.L. Doctorow's Ragtime." Monatshefte: A Journal Devoted to the Study of German Language and Literature/fur Deutschen Unterricht, Deutsc 69.4: 404-414.

*Recommended:*

- Barrett, L. (2000). "Compositions of Reality: Photography, History, and Ragtime." MFS: Modern Fiction Studies 46(4): 801-824.
- Rapf, J. E. (1998). "Volatile Forms: The Transgressive Energy of Ragtime as Novel and Film." Literature/Film Quarterly 26(1): 16-22.

*Resources for Database Assignment 5*  
Good examples of Assignment 5

**Week 14: Final exam (May 5<sup>th</sup>, 6-9 pm)**