

PHILIP R. YANNELLA



# American Literature in Context *after 1929*

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# Timeline of Texts and Historical Events

Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1929.</b> William Faulkner, <i>The Sound and the Fury</i></p> <p><b>1930.</b> Michael Gold, <i>Jews Without Money</i></p> <p>Langston Hughes, <i>Not Without Laughter</i></p> <p>Twelve Southerners, <i>I'll Take My Stand</i></p> <p>John Dos Passos, <i>The 42nd Parallel</i></p> <p>William Faulkner, <i>As I Lay Dying</i></p> <p><b>1931.</b> William Fautkner, <i>Sanctuary</i></p> <p><b>1932.</b> James T. Farrell, <i>The Young Lonigan</i></p> <p>John Dos Passos, <i>1919</i></p> <p>William Faulkner, <i>Light in August</i></p> <p><b>1933.</b> E. E. Cummings, <i>Eimi</i></p> <p>Zora Neale Hurston, "The Gilded Six Bits"</p>	<p><b>1929.</b> Stock market crash in October, triggering the Great Depression.</p> <p><b>1932.</b> "Hunger March" at Ford Motor Works in Dearborn, Michigan.</p> <p>March on Washington, DC of World War I veterans seeking immediate pensions for their service.</p> <p><b>1933.</b> 25% of Americans are unemployed (unemployment will continue to be consistently high until 1941).</p>

Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1934.</b> James T. Farrell, <i>The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan</i> Langston Hughes, <i>The Ways of White Folks</i> <b>1935.</b> <i>Proletarian Literature in the United States. An Anthology</i> Clifford Odets, <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> James T. Farrell, <i>Judgment Day</i> <b>1935–45.</b> Meridel Le Sueur, parts of <i>The Girl</i> (1978) appear in magazines from 1935 to 1945. <b>1936.</b> Carlos Bulosan, "Be American" John Dos Passos, <i>The Big Money</i> William Faulkner, <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> Carl Sandburg, <i>The People, Yes</i> <b>1937.</b> Zora Neale Hurston, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> Younghill Kang, <i>East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee</i></p>	<p>Franklin Delano Roosevelt becomes President and New Deal legislation begins to be passed (he will be re-elected in 1936, 1940, and 1944). 21st Amendment repeals 18th Amendment and Prohibition ends (though some states continue forms of prohibition under state laws). <b>1934.</b> Writer Upton Sinclair nearly wins the governorship of California as the candidate of the political movement "End Poverty in California." First American Writers' Congress held.  <b>1936.</b> The Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) publishes <i>What Is Communism?</i> by its presidential candidate, Earl Browder, which lays out Communist positions on the issues of the day for the American electorate. <b>1936–37.</b> Congress of Industrial Organizations has significant successes at unionizing important parts of the American labor force.</p>



Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1938.</b> William Faulkner, "Barn Burning"</p> <p><b>1939.</b> Pietro DiDonato, <i>Christ in Concrete</i> John Steinbeck, <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i></p> <p><b>1940.</b> Richard Wright, <i>Uncle Tom's Children</i> Richard Wright, <i>Native Son</i> William Faulkner, <i>The Hamlet</i> Budd Schulberg, <i>What Makes Sammy Run?</i></p> <p><b>1941.</b> Carlos Bulosan, "Homecoming"</p> <p><b>1942.</b> William Faulkner, <i>Go Down, Moses</i></p> <p><b>1943.</b> Ayn Rand, <i>The Fountainhead</i> Jerre Mangione, <i>Mount Allegro</i> Eudora Welty, <i>The Wide Net</i> Wallace Stegner, <i>The Big Rock Candy Mountain</i> Eudora Welty, <i>Wide Net and Other Stories</i></p> <p><b>1944.</b> Richard Wright, "I Tried to be a Communist"</p> <p><b>1945.</b> Tennessee Williams, <i>The Glass Menagerie</i></p>	<p><b>1943.</b> Repeal of Chinese Exclusion Act.</p> <p><b>1945.</b> World War II in Europe ends. US atomic bombs the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, leading to the end of the war in the Pacific. Press reports indicate that about 6 million Jews died during what will later be called the Holocaust.</p>

Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1946.</b> John Hersey, <i>Hiroshima</i>  George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"  Ann Petry, <i>The Street</i></p>	<p>Nuremburg Trials of German war criminals and Tokyo trials of Japanese war criminals begin</p> <p>Press reports of widespread juvenile delinquency (such reports will continue in the ensuing years and decades).</p> <p><b>1946.</b> George Kennan writes blueprint for theory of "Containment" (of the Soviet Union).</p> <p>British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivers his speech describing the "iron curtain" that has been erected by the Soviet Union across central and eastern Europe.</p> <p><b>1947.</b> US House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) holds hearings on Communist influence in the motion picture industry; 10 screenwriters and directors receive Contempt of Congress citations, serve jail terms, and are later blacklisted from the industry.</p> <p>US produces about half of the world's manufactured goods.</p> <p>Construction begins on the first Levittown, in a Long Island suburb of New York City.</p>

Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1948.</b> Albert Deutsch, <i>The Shame of the States</i>  Norman Mailer, <i>The Naked and the Dead</i>  Ralph Ellison, "Harlem is Nowhere" (not published until 1964)</p> <p><b>1949.</b> Richard Crossman (ed.) <i>The God That Failed</i>  Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, <i>The Poetry of the Negro</i>  Arthur Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i>  Phyllis McGinley, "Suburbia, Of Thee I Sing"</p> <p><b>1951.</b> J.D. Salinger, <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>  Rachel Carson, <i>The Sea Around Us</i></p> <p><b>1952.</b> Ralph Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i></p>	<p><b>1948.</b> Former State Department official Alger Hiss is accused of spying for the Soviet Union (later, he is convicted of perjury and goes to prison).  International Congress on Mental Health convenes in London, at which the US Surgeon General reports that one-seventeenth of the US population is "psychotic" and that 10% of Americans will spend some portion of their lives in mental institutions.</p> <p><b>1949.</b> Soviet Union tests its first atomic bomb.  China becomes a Communist state.  HUAC begins publication of massively distributed propaganda pamphlets, <i>100 Things You Should Know About Communism</i>.</p> <p>Department of Justice begins prosecution of Communist Party leaders under the Alien Registration Act of 1940 (Smith Act).  The film <i>Red Menace</i> is released, one of the earliest of a great number of anti-Communist films made in the ensuing years.</p> <p><b>1950.</b> South Korea is invaded by Communist North Korea.  Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and associates are indicted for spying for the Soviet Union.</p>





Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1955.</b> Vladimir Nabokov, <i>Lolita</i>            Flannery O'Connor, <i>A Good Man is Hard to Find</i>            Sloan Wilson, <i>The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit</i>            Rachel Carson, <i>The Edge of the Sea</i></p> <p><b>1956.</b> Gwendolyn Brooks, <i>Bronzeville Boys and Girls</i>            Allen Ginsberg, <i>Howl and Other Poems</i>            William H. Whyte, <i>The Organization Man</i></p> <p><b>1957.</b> William Faulkner, <i>The Town</i>            James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"            Norman Mailer, "The White Negro"            Jack Kerouac, <i>On the Road</i>            Bernard Malamud, <i>The Assistant</i>            John Keats, <i>The Crack in the Picture Window</i>            Loren Eiseley, <i>The Immense Journey</i>            William Mann Dobriner, <i>The Suburban Community</i></p> <p><b>1958.</b> Howard Fast, <i>The Naked God: The Writer and the Communist Party</i>            Tennessee Williams, <i>Suddenly Last Summer</i></p>	<p>The Rosenbergs are executed (their associates serve prison terms).</p> <p>US Senate censures Senator McCarthy for bringing the Senate into "dishonor and disrepute."</p> <p>US Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency begins hearings.</p> <p><b>1956.</b> Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev gives speech in which he says his predecessor, Josef Stalin, committed a vast number of criminal acts, including the ordering of "mass repression" of Soviet citizens.</p>

Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1959.</b> John Cheever, "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill"  William Faulkner, <i>The Mansion</i>  Michael Harrington, "Our Fifty Million Poor"</p> <p><b>1960.</b> Bernard Malamud, <i>The Magic Barrel</i>  Paul Goodman, <i>Growing Up Absurd</i>  Bennett Berger, <i>Working-Class Suburb</i>  John Updike, <i>Rabbit Run</i>  Philip Roth, <i>Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories</i></p> <p><b>1961.</b> Lewis Mumford, <i>The City in History</i>  Richard Yates, <i>Revolutionary Road</i></p> <p><b>1962.</b> Ken Kesey, <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i>  Betty Friedan, <i>The Feminine Mystique</i>  Edward Albee, <i>Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf</i>  Rachel Carson, <i>Silent Spring</i>  Michael Harrington, <i>The Other America</i>  Herbert Gans, <i>The Urban Villagers</i></p> <p><b>1963.</b> Flannery O'Connor, "The Regional Writer"  Gwendolyn Brooks, <i>Selected Poems</i>  Sylvia Plath, <i>The Bell Jar</i>  James Baldwin, <i>The Fire Next Time</i></p>	<p><b>1959.</b> Vice President Richard M. Nixon and Premier Nikita Khrushchev debate the merits of the capitalist and Communist systems at a trade show in Moscow.</p> <p><b>1961.</b> Freedom Rides in southern states led by Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).</p> <p><b>1962.</b> Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) founded.</p> <p><b>1963.</b> President John F. Kennedy assassinated.</p>

Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1964.</b> Hubert Selby, Jr., <i>Last Exit to Brooklyn</i>  Amiri Baraka, <i>Dutchman</i>  Dan Greenburg, <i>How To Be A Jewish Mother: A Very Lovely Training Manual</i></p>	<p><b>1964.</b> Free Speech Movement at the University of California at Berkeley.  Students do community organizing and voter registration during "Mississippi Summer."  Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed by Congress and signed by President.</p> <p><b>1965.</b> Malcolm X assassinated.  Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed by Congress and signed by President.  President Johnson announces his administration will wage an "unconditional war on poverty."  Hart-Celler Act regarding immigration abolishes national quotas.</p>
<p><b>1966.</b> Truman Capote, <i>In Cold Blood</i>  SNCC, "The Basis of Black Power"  <b>1967.</b> Jerry Farber, "The Student as Nigger"  Warren Hinckle, "A Social History of the Hippies"  Herbert Gans, <i>The Levittowners</i>  Norman Mailer, <i>Why Are We in Vietnam?</i>  Robert Bly and David Ray (ed.), <i>A Poetry Reading Against the Vietnam War</i></p>	<p><b>1965-67.</b> Riots and other civil disturbances in black areas of many cities.</p>
<p><b>1968.</b> Eldridge Cleaver, <i>Soul on Ice</i></p>	<p><b>1968.</b> Martin Luther King, Jr., assassinated.  Robert Kennedy assassinated.</p>

Texts	Historical Events
<p>Norman Mailer, <i>The Armies of the Night</i></p> <p>Naomi Jaffe and Bernadine Dohrn, "The Look is You: A Strategy for Radical Women"</p> <p>Tom Wolfe, <i>The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test</i></p> <p>The Last <i>Whole Earth Catalog</i></p> <p><b>1969.</b> Philip Roth, <i>Portnoy's Complaint</i></p> <p><b>1970.</b> H. Rapp Brown, <i>Die, Nigger, Die</i></p> <p>Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That"</p> <p>Robert Bly, "The Teeth Mother Naked at Last"</p> <p>James Dickey, <i>Deliverance</i></p> <p><b>1971.</b> Ann Petry, "The Witness"</p> <p>Charles Bukowski, <i>Post Office</i></p> <p><b>1973.</b> Toni Morrison, <i>Sula</i></p> <p><b>1976.</b> Norman Maclean, <i>A River Runs Through It</i></p> <p><b>1977.</b> Michael Herr, <i>Dispatches</i></p> <p><b>1978.</b> Andrew Macdonald, <i>The Turner Diaries</i></p> <p><b>1982.</b> William Least Heat-Moon, <i>Blue Highways</i></p> <p><b>1985.</b> Gretel Ehrlich, "The Solace of Open Spaces"</p> <p><b>1988.</b> Bharati Mukherjee, <i>The Middleman and Other Stories</i></p> <p><b>1996.</b> Gish Jen, <i>Mona in the Promised Land</i></p>	<p>Strike at San Francisco State University.</p> <p>National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders explains recent city riots as mainly the consequence of white racism, police brutality, the lack of employment opportunities for blacks, and the deteriorated condition of many black neighborhoods.</p> <p><b>1971.</b> A study done at Cornell University reports that the US has dropped 6.3 million tons of aerial munitions on Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (during WW II, the US dropped 2 million tons in all its operations).</p> <p><b>1978.</b> Partial core meltdown of nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania.</p>



Texts	Historical Events
<p><b>1997.</b> Philip Roth, <i>American Pastoral</i></p> <p><b>1998.</b> Philip Roth, <i>I Married a Communist</i></p> <p>Barry Lopez, <i>About This Life</i></p>	
<p><b>2004.</b> Philip Roth, <i>The Plot Against America</i></p> <p><b>2006.</b> Richard Ford, <i>The Lay of the Land</i></p> <p><b>2007.</b> Ha Jin, <i>A Free Life</i></p> <p>Junot Diaz, <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i></p> <p><b>2009.</b> Ha Jin, <i>A Good Fall</i></p>	<p><b>2000.</b> Census indicates that as a result of the immigration reforms begun in the 1960s, about 10% of the American population is foreign-born.</p> <p><b>2009.</b> Pew Research Center estimates that about 11 million illegal immigrants live in the US (out of a population of 300 million).</p>

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# Introduction

*American Literature in Context after 1929* is intended to provide readers with basic knowledge about key, ongoing American social issues so that they can better understand literary texts. As in my *American Literature in Context from 1865 to 1929*, each chapter describes an issue and then discusses how it was engaged by representative writers. I do not attempt to provide an historian's hindsight perspective that utilizes a full array of evidence; rather, I present the issues as they might have been understood by writers at the times they were writing. The ongoing issues include the following: (1) how individuals are valued, how ordinary people fare in American society, and what opportunities exist for them; (2) the nature and role of the state and how it responds to real and perceived threats; (3) how the young respond to the world they will inherit; (4) how people are connected to one another and to the places in which they live; and (5) how newcomers fare in the US. Each of the five is absolutely fundamental. Each could generate encyclopedias of information, discussion, and debate – and has done so.

My account of the issues and their involvement in representative literary works is broad and brief. The first chapter is about the political and literary ferment of the Great Depression and World War II years, ending in a brief listing of the horrendous numbers of World War II deaths. It focuses on social change issues and the interest of many writers in so-called “ordinary people” or “everyday folk” as primary subjects. The second chapter is about anti-Communism, the overarching movement that determined many features of post-World War II American foreign and domestic policy and that also

had a profound influence on American writing and on literary culture. Following a brief description of the postwar American economic boom, the third chapter describes widespread concern about the well-being of the nation's young people and the "discovery" that millions of Americans suffered from mental illness. Juvenile misbehavior and mental illness was explored – and sometimes celebrated – in major literary works. The chapter ends with some comments on 1960s youth radicalism and literature about the Vietnam War. The fourth chapter focuses on broad discussions of the values associated with city life, suburban life, rural life, the built environment, and the natural environment; issues regarding allegedly meaningless work as opposed to worthwhile work are discussed in this chapter because of the close association of place with work. The final chapter is a discussion of some examples of mid-century ethnic writing, an account of the 1965 legislative reopening of the country to large-scale immigration, and a discussion of some very recent writing by "new" immigrants.

In *American Literature in Context from 1865 to 1929*, I assumed that most of my readers had little knowledge of basic historical events and trends. Here, I assumed that readers have at least a working knowledge of the causes and consequences of World War II, the civil rights movement, the youth rebellions of the 1960s, and the causes and consequences of the Vietnam War. If some readers did not have that prior knowledge, I reasoned, they could easily get it through website articles and other commonly available resources.

The most intense period of social engagement by American writers began shortly after the stock market crash of 1929 and continued into the World War II years. After 1945, writers showed far less interest in wealth and poverty, power and powerlessness, the situations of ordinary workers, and so forth. One cause for this lessening of interest was the disaffection of many writers from politics because of the failures of Communism, the chief sponsor of engaged literature for more than two decades. A second cause was the developing sense in American literary culture that, as the English writer George Orwell put it in his widely read 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language," politics was "a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and