

The New Deal Era's Federal Writers' Project

Schedule

SUNDAY 7/11	<p>Virtual Meet and Greet @ 1-3 pm EST</p> <p>Overview of institute (institute objectives, schedule of activities, assigned readings, recommended readings, think tanks, NYC resources, etc.)</p> <p>Story Circle (Roadside Theater Story Circle Guidelines) Telling Our Stories</p> <p>Individual research and teaching interests, including any already initiated projects.</p>
WEEK ONE	<p>FWP HISTORY: WRITING AMERICA'S FIRST "SELF PORTRAIT"</p> <p>Objectives: (1) trace FWP's history, mission, goals, accomplishments, limitations, and legacy, especially within the sociohistorical context of the Great Depression and with respect to our understanding of representations of American people, events, and places; (2) begin examining FWP archives with particular attention to the American Guide Series and American Life Histories and the complexities of representation and tensions between what Hirsch describes as "romantic nationalism" and "cultural pluralism" (<i>Portrait of America</i>). This latter theme is one to which we will return throughout the institute.</p>
	<p>FWP Project: American Guide Series; American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940</p> <p>Case Studies: <i>New York Panorama</i> and the <i>WPA Dallas Guide and History</i></p> <p>Readings: Hirsch, <i>Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project</i>; DeMasi, <i>Henry Alsberg: The Driving Force of the New Deal Federal Writers' Project</i>; <i>First-Person America</i>; Mangione, <i>The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943</i>; Mutnick, "Toward a Twenty-First Century Federal Writers' Project," <i>College English</i>, vol. 77, no. 2, pp. 124-145.</p>
MONDAY ¹ 7/12	Codirectors: Introduction to FWP; overview of institute
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	<p>Broad introduction to FWP mission, challenges, accomplishments, and politics as well as an initial survey of digital resources with focus on the American Guide Series and American Life Histories.</p> <p>Screening and discussion of <i>Soul of a People: Writing America's Story</i>, directed by Andrea Kalin (92 minutes)</p>
Study Group	<p>Representing America through the American Guide Series and American Life Histories. Discover and share FWP guide entries about places with which participants identify (home state, for example).</p> <p>See handout #1.</p>
TUESDAY 7/13	Visiting Scholar #1: Jerrold Hirsch (historical and cultural significance and relevance of the FWP)

¹ Unless otherwise specified, the co-directors and/or visiting scholars will meet with participants each day of the institute in a seminar from 12-3 pm EST. Participants will meet in study groups at a mutually convenient time according to time zones in the Seminar 12-3 pm (EST) or Study Group for 90 minutes to 2 hours. See Study Group Handouts for each week of the institute. Co-directors and visiting scholars will be available for consultations with individuals and small groups from 11-12 am and 3-4 pm EST by appointment).

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Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Plenary: "Discovering America: From Romantic Nationalism to Cultural Pluralism" (Hirsch) Workshop on research methods and documentary tools (Hirsch) ² Readings: Hirsch, <i>Portrait</i> , "Romantic Nationalism," pp. 1-105; "Modernity and Cultural Pluralism," pp. 107-94.
Study Group	Continue to explore, share, and discuss American Guide Series and American Life Histories.
Public Lecture 7:00-8:00 EST	Jerrold Hirsch: The Relevance of the Federal Writers' Project in the 2020s (tentative)
WEDNESDAY 7/14	Codirectors: Local Histories, Then and Now
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Plenary: Key questions raised by Hirsch about the FWP and its history, politics, and legacy. Initial discussion about individual and collaborative projects.
Study Group	Continue to work on handout #1: finding, reviewing, and analyzing FWP state guides and life stories.
THURSDAY 7/15	Visiting Scholar #2: Susan Rubinstein DeMasi (FWP administration, policies, and leadership)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Plenary: "Henry Alsberg: The Man Who Helped Tell America's Story" (DeMasi) Reading: DeMasi (Introduction; chapters 9 and 10)
Study Group	Prepare presentations for Friday's Think Tank #1
FRIDAY 7/16	Think Tank #1: "Telling America's Story in <i>American Life Histories</i>"
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Library of Congress Presentation (speaker tba) Think Tank #1: "Telling America's Story" (participants draw conclusions from the week's readings, seminar discussions, and visiting scholars about the nature, quality, aims, and achievements of the FWP's efforts to create America's first "self-portrait")
Study Group	Reflection on project goals and outcomes. See handout #1.
WEEK TWO	FWP OUTPUT: THE AMBIGUITIES OF "REPRESENTING" AMERICA Objectives: (1) investigate case studies vis-à-vis challenges of representation emerging from labor (Massachusetts WP) and race relations (e.g., Illinois and in the FWP Slave Narratives);

² Each week, visiting scholars will discuss their own research process, encounters with FWP and related archival materials, and research tips for participants. Particular emphasis will be placed on documentary tools emerging from FWP's work nearly a century ago and implications and applications for current work.

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	(2) consider these themes with respect to FWP's attempts to represent place through the American Guide Series and life histories.
	<p>FWP Projects: <i>American Guide Series</i>; <i>Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the FWP, 1936-1938</i></p> <p>Case Studies: State Guides for Massachusetts, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Illinois; <i>Born in Slavery</i></p> <p>Readings: Bold, <i>Writers, Plumbers and Anarchists: The WPA Writers' Project in Massachusetts</i>; Dolinar, <i>The Negro in Illinois: The WPA Papers</i>; Schulten, "How to See Colorado: The Federal Writers' Project, American Regionalism, and the 'Old New Western History.'" Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems"; Stewart, <i>Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the FWP</i> (2016); Stephanie Jones-Rogers, <i>They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South</i> (2019.)</p>
MONDAY 7/19	Codirectors: The Geography of the State Guides (representing place)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	<p>Discussion: "Representing Place in The American Guide Series: American Regionalism in the FWP" (co-directors);</p> <p>Problems of representation in the Colorado and Massachusetts state guides.</p> <p>Survey of <i>Born in Slavery</i> Digital Archives: Reading the Narratives</p> <p>Group Activity: Lessons from the FWP about representation: select transcripts from slave narratives that counter contemporary representations of slavery</p>
Study Group	Teaching tools: Discuss readings about Colorado and Massachusetts in relation to other state guides reviewed in week one. Begin to develop an assignment, activity, or other teaching tool. See handout #2.
TUESDAY 7/20	Visiting Scholar #3: Brian Dolinar (race and the ambiguities of representation in the American Guide Series)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	<p>Plenary: Epic, "Elegy, Ledger: From Slavery to the Black Metropolis" (Dolinar)</p> <p>Research Methods: Dolinar shares research experiences and tips. See also "A book that binds black history in Illinois" (<i>Chicago Tribune</i>, 8 Sept. 2013)</p> <p>Reading: Dolinar, <i>The Negro in Illinois: The WPA Papers</i></p>
Study Group	Consider how best to present the content, history, and significance of <i>The Negro in Illinois</i> to students.
WEDNESDAY 7/21	Visiting Scholar #4: Catherine A. Stewart (race and the ambiguities of representation in the Slave Narratives)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Plenary: "Constructing History: Representing Race in the FWP" (Stewart)

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	<p>Research Methods: Workshop/discussion with Stewart about her research process and role of FWP archives, insights, and legacy</p> <p>Discuss Stewart, <i>Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the FWP</i></p>
Study Group	Consider issues of representations of race in the Illinois Writers' Project's research and writing and the Slave Narratives collection. How would you teach this material? What further research might you and your students pursue?
THURSDAY 7/22	Visiting Scholar #5: Stephanie Jones-Rogers (rereading the FWP narratives for stories about the significant role played by white women as slave owners)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	<p>Plenary: TBA</p> <p>See also Jones-Rogers' podcast, "Rallying Behind Racism: The Women Behind White Supremacy" ("Rallying Behind Racism")</p>
Study Group	Share teaching and research ideas and prepare to present at Friday's think tank.
FRIDAY 7/23	Group activity (Study Group) Think Tank #2: (Seminar): "Reflecting on Lessons from the FWP about the Ambiguities of Representation and Productive Countermeasures"
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	<p>Think Tank #2: "Reflecting on Lessons from the FWP about the Ambiguities of Representation and Productive Countermeasures"</p> <p>Explore how our work might help facilitate counter-storytelling efforts that take into account issues raised throughout the institute, documenting stories from people that tell the stories they'd most like to see circulated in public record? Help develop a new understanding of who we are as a country and our place within it.</p>
Study Group	Further reflections on weeks 1 & 2 (optional)
WEEK THREE	<p>THE FWP'S LITERARY LEGACY: ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF ITS INFLUENCE</p> <p>Objectives: (1) Move from the FWP's collective output to its much-cited influence on American literature through case studies of work by individual FWP writers, some of whom would become seminal figures in African American literature; (2) return to FWP's archives to recover underrepresented stories of what Hirsch identifies as the "cultural pluralism" obscured or distorted by the "romantic nationalism" that limited and shaped the project's output and receptions of its "portrait" of America</p>
	<p>FWP Projects: Illinois Writing Project; <i>Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the FWP, 1936-1938</i></p> <p>Case Studies: Combined documentary and literary writings of individual FWP writers and their creative works that followed (e.g., Richard Wright; Zora Neale Hurston; Dorothy West; Ralph Ellison; Meridel Le Sueur)</p> <p>Readings: Rutkowski, <i>Literary Legacies of the Federal Writers' Project: Voices of the Depression in the American Postwar Era</i> (2017); Tidwell, <i>After Winter: The Art and Life of Sterling A. Brown</i> (2009), and Brown's creative works; Selected ethnographic nonfiction and short works by Richard Wright, paired with Hathaway, "Native Geography..." (see Monday below); Zora Neale Hurston (see Thursday below)</p>

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MONDAY 7/26	Codirectors: African American Documentary Writing (Richard Wright and Meridel Le Sueur)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	<p>Discussion: "African American Documentary Writing and FWP's Literary Legacy" Case Study: Richard Wright, Meridel Le Sueur, and the FWP (codirectors)</p> <p>Introduce and assign case studies of FWP writers and their literary legacies (Wright, Hurston, West, Le Sueur, Ellison). Begin work with guidance/support of codirectors.</p> <p>Readings: Rosemary Hathaway, "Native Geography: Richard Wright's Work for the Federal Writers' Project in Chicago" (2008); Richard Wright, "A Survey of the Amusement Facilities of District #35" (1937/2008); <i>12 Million Black Voices</i>. (1941/2008); "Bright and Star" (in <i>Uncle Tom's Children</i> 1940/2008); J. J. Butts, <i>African American Review</i>, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter 2011), pp. 649-666; Meridel Le Sueur, <i>The Girl</i> (1939/2006); <i>Ripening, Selected Work</i>, ed. Elaine Hedges (1993).</p>
Study Group	<p>Review primary source materials by five former FWP writers who each made significant contributions to American literature and culture ("case studies"). Each packet will contain representative examples of an individual writer's work in and beyond the FWP, e.g., "Case Study: Zora Neal Hurston and the FWP," includes her 1939 proposal to the Florida WP to "record" life across this diverse state, excerpts from her <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> (1937), and <i>Mules and Men</i> (1935).</p> <p>See handout #3.</p>
TUESDAY 7/27	Visiting Scholar # 6: Sara Rutkowski (FWP's literary legacy)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	<p>Plenary: "Rereading Dorothy West through the Lens of the FWP" (Rutkowski)</p> <p>Research Methods: Workshop/discussion with Rutkowski about her methods and use of FWP archives; consultations with co-directors and Rutkowski on case studies</p>
Study Group	Continue working on case studies. Prepare to present case studies on Wednesday.
WEDNESDAY 7/28	FWP's Literary Legacy Case Studies (Study Group) Presentations (Seminar)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Group presentations on case studies representing FWP's literary legacy
Study Group	Begin conceptualizing teaching tools and/or research questions.
THURSDAY 7/29	Visiting Scholar #7: John Edgar Tidwell ("FWP Leadership and Representations of Race")
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	<p>Plenary: "Sterling Brown: From FWP Leadership to Literary Luminary" (Tidwell)</p> <p>Research Methods: Workshop/discussion with Tidwell about his research process and role of FWP archives, insights, and legacy.</p>

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	Reading: Selections from Brown's prose and poetry relevant to the 1930s and 1940s
Study Group	Share teaching and research ideas. Write up for Think Tank #3.
FRIDAY 7/30	Think Tank #3: Reflections on the FWP's Literary and Cultural Legacy" (Seminar 12-3) Screen <i>Unchained Memories: Readings from the Slave Narratives</i> (Study Group)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Think Tank #3: Reflections on FWP's Literary and Cultural Legacy. What are the key elements of the FWP's literary legacy? Cultural legacy? What were the politics that gave rise to the FWP and spelled its demise? Discuss project and learning outcomes.
Study Group	Screen and discuss <i>Unchained Memories: Readings from the Slave Narratives</i> , directed by Mark Jonathan Harris.
WEEK FOUR	FWP LEGACIES: AMERICAN CULTURE AND CONTEMPORARY COUNTERPARTS Objectives: (1) Consider FWP's legacy by examining 21st century examples; (2) explore FWP's implications and potential applications for humanities teaching and research today.
	FWP Project: <i>Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the FWP, 1936-1938</i> Case Studies: Bowen, Visualizing Literacy in FWP Slave Narratives Epps-Robertson, Civil Rights Movement in Virginia and <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> Jolliffe, The Arkansas Delta Oral History Project Grobman, Community-Engaged Projects with The Central Pennsylvania African American Museum and Centro Hispano Carter, Remixing Rural Texas, Local Texts, Global Contexts Mutnick, Pathways to Freedom: Mapping Civil Rights Oral Histories in Time and Space ³ Readings: Griswold, <i>American Guides: The Federal Writers' Project and the Casting of American Culture</i> (2016); Hirsch, "Rediscovering America: The FWP Legacy and Challenge" (2013); Candace Epps-Robertson, <i>Resisting Brown: Race, Literacy, and Citizenship in the Heart of Virginia</i> (2018); Jolliffe et. al., <i>The Arkansas Delta Oral History Project: Culture, Place, and Authenticity</i> (2016); Grobman, "'Engaging Race': Critical Race Inquiry and Community-Engaged Scholarship" (2017); Carter and Mutnick, "Writing Democracy: Notes on a Federal Writers' Project" (2013); Allsop, The Enduring Lessons of a New Deal writers' project
MONDAY 8/2	Visiting Scholar #8: Betsy Bowen Visiting Scholar #9: Candace Epps-Robertson
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Panel: "Race, Literacy, and Resistance: From Slavery to the Civil Rights Movement" (Bowen, "Writing Freedom" and Epps-Robertson, "Resisting Brown")

³ Carter's and Mutnick's case studies were supported by funds from NEH Digital Humanities Startup Grants in 20011 and 2012 respectively.

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	Q&A: “Representation and Resistance across the Civil Rights Movement: From the Urban North (New York City) to the Rural South (Virginia and Texas)”
Study Group	Apply the lessons of the FWP to research methods and documentary tools you might employ for student and or community history projects. See handout #4
TUESDAY 8/3	Visiting Scholar #10: Laurie Grobman Visiting Scholar #11: David Jolliffe
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Panel: “Cultural Legacies: Re/writing America for the 21 st Century” (Grobman and Jolliffe) Q&A: “From the FWP to 21 st Century Documentary Projects: Exploring Documentary Tools and Methods to Tell History from Below”
Study Group	Workshop independent projects
Special Forum	The FWP in 21st Century Brooklyn: Neighbors Represent Neighbors—the Voices of Lefferts Project (Mutnick) Meet with Voices of Lefferts project team members, writers, and artists. Readings: <i>America Eats</i> ; excerpts from <i>American Life Histories</i> and Vol. 3, Issue 1 of <i>Voices of Lefferts: The Flatbush-PLG Community Writing Journal</i> .
WEDNESDAY 8/4	Research & Writing Day
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	First round of presentations
Study Group	Continue to workshop independent projects
THURSDAY 8/5	Presentations (Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)) Think Tank #4 (Study Group)
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Second round of presentations
Study Group	Continue to workshop independent projects
FRIDAY 8/6	Final presentations Institute wrap-up
Seminar 12-3 pm (EST)	Final round of presentations Institute wrap-up