

Prof. Courtney Fullilove  
Bertolt Brecht's America  
Winter 2021

Wesleyan University  
HIST###  
Bertolt Brecht's America  
Prof. Courtney Fullilove

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Student/Office hours:  
By appointment, MW 2-3:30 PM EST,  
via Zoom:  
<https://wesleyan.zoom.us/j/8079060719>  
Meeting ID: 807 906 0719

Photo: Bertolt Brecht in NYC, Ruth  
Berlau 1946 (?)



### Course Description:

The German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht was a passionate student and critic of American society, before and after his exile in the United States during World War II. This course engages Bertolt Brecht's writings about the United States as a device for studying the history of American economy and society. Brecht's studies of Karl Marx's writings informed his interpretation of the plight of the industrial working class, while his vision of epic theater made American history into a morality play on a grand scale. In exile following the rise of the Third Reich, Brecht produced mordant observations on his life in California, which was then home to a flowering of Marxist cultural criticism. He eventually returned to East Berlin in 1947, after being interrogated by the the House Un-American Activities Committee, Senator Joseph McCarthy's vehicle of Cold War anti-communism.

Brecht's politics, and his incessant imagination of the virtues and vices of social and economic life, render him a charismatic guide to nineteenth and twentieth century American history. His personal history in exile renders him a witness and an object of American political culture. A selection of Brecht's plays, poetry, and film collaborations, including *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1927/1930), *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1929/31), and "Hollywood Elegies" (1942), provide a scaffold for our readings on the history of westward expansion, the gold rush, urbanization, industrialization, industrial food systems, democracy, and anti-communism.

All Brecht's works are provided in English translation. Students may choose to read/view German language editions/productions instead. Our selection of materials relies heavily on Patty Lee Parmalee, *Brecht's America*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981 (pre-WWII) and James K. Lyon's *Bertolt Brecht in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980 (post-WWII).

### Course Format:

This course will be offered asynchronously and fully online, in eight units (two per week). Each unit is divided into View (V), Read (R), and Write (W) exercises.

- V: The course requires significant commitment of time to view recorded theatrical productions and operas indicated on the course schedule, in addition to recorded lecture segments for each unit [moodle].
- R: The course also requires substantial readings not only of Brecht's writings, but of related works of literature and history.
- W: Students will participate in interactive discussion boards [moodle] and collaborative reading and annotation [Perusall]. They will also produce individual writing assignments. (See "Assignments and Grading Distribution" below.)

The course schedule comprises 40 hours of content (10 hours/week), consisting of viewing/listening (recorded lectures and theatrical performance) and discussion with classmates and instructor (see Assignments for discussion format). Students should expect to spend 60 hours total (15 hours/week) on reading and writing ("homework"), with additional time allotted for three short papers (5 double-spaced pp. each, projected 10 hours per paper, 30 hours total). The course also requires individually scheduled meetings with the instructor [Zoom] in weeks 2, 3, and 4 to discuss each short paper (formulation and feedback/revision).

### **Learning Objectives**

Students will develop familiarity with historical methodologies as well as major themes in American history. We will model the interpretation of literature as a primary and secondary source for the writing of history.

### **Textbooks and Materials**

All required readings are available on the moodle course page and via e-reserve, linked on moodle. In addition to Brecht's works, we will read substantial portions or the entirety of the following:

- William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991)
- Galbraith, John Kenneth. *A Short History of Financial Euphoria* (1994)
- Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (2000)
- Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (2016)
- Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1905)

### **Participation and Expectations**

Students are expected to participate regularly in online forums and to fulfill all assignments in a timely way. In the midst of the current pandemic, we all face challenges with workspace and connectivity. If there are particular obstacles to your full participation in the course, please schedule a meeting with me to discuss workarounds.

### **Grading**

Assignments are graded according to the Wesleyan University grade scale:

[https://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/general\\_information/GPA\\_calculation.html](https://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/general_information/GPA_calculation.html)

"A" grades are reserved for exceptional work. An "A-" indicates very good work. "B+" grades indicate good work with room for development in argumentation, style, or grammar. "B" and "B-" grades indicate adequate work with room for significant development one or more of the foregoing categories. "C" and "D" range grades are reserved for passing work, which nevertheless demonstrates significant flaws in content and argumentation, as well as grammar and style. "F" marks failing work. Compliance/non-compliance with the formal requirements of the assignment also factor into the overall grade.

A credit/no credit (CR/U) grading option is available for this course. Students are responsible for declaring this option by the university deadline.

### **Assignments and Grade Distribution**

- Three short papers (1250 words each) on assignments posted to moodle, due at the end of Weeks 2, 3, and 4, Friday 11:59 PM Eastern Time [20% each/60% total]
- Class participation (8 credit/no credit moodle and Perusall discussion posts on the prompt provided, worth 5 percentage points each, due weekly by Tuesday and Thursday 11:59 PM) [40% total]

For all units on the Course Schedule, unless otherwise indicated, students should:

1. Follow the instructions for the session indicated on the moodle Course Schedule.
2. Meet virtually or in person with your rotating reading group or partner, selected via google doc sign-up on Moodle.
3. Contribute a joint posting to the linked discussion forum on Moodle, addressing any questions posed therein.
4. Review the complete discussion forum before proceeding to the next unit.

### **Extra Credit**

There are no options for extra credit in this course.

### **Covid-19 Code of Conduct**

To protect your health and safety, the health and safety of instructors and staff, and the health and safety of your peers, all students must understand and adhere to the University's Covid-19 Code of Conduct. Students are encouraged to review the code of conduct regularly to stay up to date on the current code.

### **Accommodation Statement**

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact Accessibility Services in order to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021/218, or can be reached by email ([accessibility@wesleyan.edu](mailto:accessibility@wesleyan.edu)) or phone (860-685-2332).

### **Religious Observances**

Faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required assignments/attendance. If this applies to you, please speak with me directly as soon as possible at the beginning of the term.

### **Classroom Behavior**

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, ability, and nationality. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on the student code.

### **Discrimination and Harassment**

Wesleyan University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. Wesleyan will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this Wesleyan policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office for Equity and Inclusion at 860-685-4771. The responsibility of the University Members has more information.

### **Honor Code**

All students of Wesleyan University are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council – Office of Student Affairs. Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). The Office of Student Affairs has more information.

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**Course Schedule:**

**WEEK 1: 1920s: Epic Theater/Brecht's Jungles**

**Unit 1: "Epic Theater" (Introduction to Bertolt Brecht)**

V:

- Recorded Lecture: "Epic Theater and Brecht's America"
- Bertolt Brecht. *The Threepenny Opera* (film collaboration with G.W. Pabst in Hollywood)

R:

*Brecht:*

- Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*. Bloomsbury 2015. pp. 36 – 39, 61 - 80.

*Additional Reading:*

- Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), Biography pp. v – xiv and Commentary pp. xxiv - xlv.
- Walter Benjamin. "What is Epic Theater?" In: *Illuminations*.

W:

- Discussion forum, by Tuesday 11:59 PM

**Unit 2: "In the Jungle" (Brecht's America)**

V:

- Recorded lecture: "Chicago: Market in the Mud"
- Bertolt Brecht, *In the Jungle of Cities* (1923/1927)

R:

*Brecht:*

- Bertolt Brecht, *St. Joan of the Stockyards* (1929-31)

*Additional Reading:*

- Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1905),
- William Cronon *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991), Chapter on Meat

W:

- Discussion forum, by Thursday 11:59 PM
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**WEEK 2: 1920s: American Capital: Captains of Industry/Robber Barons**

**Unit 3: Man from Manhattan (1924-1926)**

V:

- Recorded lecture: "Captains of Industry"

R:

*Brecht:*

- *Poems and Fragments* [selections]
- *Man from Manhattan*

*Additional Reading:*

- Sherwood Anderson, *Poor White* (1920)
- Frank Harris, *My Life and Loves* (1922)
- Erich Mendelsohn, *America: An Architect's Picture Book* (1926) [selections]
- Gustavus Myers, *History of the Great American Fortunes* (1910) [selections]

W:

- Discussion forum, by Tuesday 11:59 PM

**Unit 4: Joe Fleischhacker and Other Fragments**

V:

- Recorded Lecture: "Robber Barons"

R:

*Brecht:*

- "Before The Flood"
- *Dan Drew* (1925-6)
- *Joe Fleischhacker in Chicago* (1924-29)

*Additional Reading:*

- Ida Tarbell, *The Life of Elbert H. Gary* (1926) [selections]
- Frank Norris, *The Pit* (1903)
- Bouck White, *The Book of Daniel Drew* (1910) [selections]

W:

- Discussion forum, by Thursday 11:59 PM
  - Short paper, by Friday 11:59 PM
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### **WEEK 3: 1927-1931: Great Depression**

#### **Unit 5: Brecht's Political Development/Studying Marx (1927-1929)**

V:

- Recorded Lecture: "Mahagonny and the Learning Plays [*Lehrstücke*]"
- *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1927/1930) (Met production)

R:

*Brecht:*

- *Mahagonny Songspiel* (1927)
- *Happy End* (1929)
- *Flight over the Ocean* (1929)

*Additional Reading:*

- Karl Marx, [which?? selections]
- Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (2000)

W:

- Discussion forum, by Tuesday 11:59 PM

#### **Unit 6: The Great Depression (1929-1931)**

V:

- Recorded Lecture: "Confidence and Panic in American Economic Life"
- *Kuhle Wampe* (1932)

R:

*Brecht:*

- "Vanished Glory of the Giant City New York"
- "The Bread of the People"
- "Solidarity Song" (from *Kuhle Wampe*)

*Additional Reading:*

- J John Dewey, "The Collapse of a Romance," *The New Republic*, April 27, 1932
- John Kenneth Galbraith, *A Short History of Financial Euphoria* (New York: Penguin, 1994)

W:

- Discussion forum, by Thursday 11:59 PM
  - Short paper, by Friday 11:59 PM
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## **WEEK 4: 1933-1947: National Socialism and Postwar Anti-Communism**

### **Unit 7: The Third Reich and World War II**

V:

- Recorded Lecture: "European Dissidents in American Exile"
- *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939)

R:

*Brecht:*

- Bertolt Brecht. "Short Organon for the Theatre" (1948). In: *Brecht on Theatre*. pp. 229-255.

*Additional Reading:*

- Gerwin Strobl. *The Swastika and the Stage: German Theatre and Society, 1933 – 1945*. Cambridge University Press 2009. pp. 109 - 133.

W:

- Discussion forum, by Tuesday 11:59 PM

### **Unit 8: "Hollywood Elegies" (post-1941): Anti-Communism and the Culture Industry**

V:

- Recorded Lecture: "McCarthyism and the Red Scare"
- *The Hangman Also Dies* (1943) (collaboration with Fritz Lang in Hollywood)
- Interrogation by the House Un-American Activities Committee [HUAC] (1947)

R:

*Brecht:*

- "Hollywood Elegies" (1942)

*Additional Reading:*

- Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944)
- Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (2016)

W:

- Discussion forum, by Thursday 11:59 PM
- Short paper, by Friday 11:59 PM



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**Additional Resources on Brecht and Brecht on/in America:**

Brecht, Bertolt: *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, Ed.: Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf, Werner Mittenzwei, Klaus-Detlef Müller, Aufbau/Suhrkamp, Berlin/Frankfurt am Main 1989-2000.

Bertolt Brecht: *The Collected Poems*, Ed.: Tom Kuhn, David Constantine, W.W. Norton, New York 2018.

Bertolt Brecht: *Collected Plays*, Ed.: Tom Kuhn, John Willett, Bloomsbury, London 2009-2012  
Bertolt Brecht: *Brecht on Art and Politics*, Ed.: Tom Kuhn, Steve Giles, Bloomsbury, London 2003.

Michael Bienert: *Brechts Berlin. Literarische Schauplätze*, Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, Berlin 2018.

David Barnett: *Brecht in Practice. Theatre, Theory and Performance*, Bloomsbury, London 2015.

David Barnett: *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*, Cambridge University Press 2015  
Stephen Parker: *Bertolt Brecht. A Literary Life*, Bloomsbury, London 2014. (German version: *Bertolt Brecht. Eine Biographie*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2018)  
Werner Hecht: *Die Mühen der Ebenen. Brecht und die DDR*, Aufbau, Berlin 2013.

Robert E. Cazden, *German exile literature in America, 1933-1950; a history of the Free German Press and Book Trade*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1970.

Werner Hecht: *Brecht-Chronik. 1898-1956*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1997  
Peter Thomson, Glendyr Sacks (Ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, Cambridge University Press 1994.

Jan Knopf, Brigitte Bergheim, Joachim Lucchesi (Ed.): *Brecht-Handbuch*, Metzler, Stuttgart 2001-2003.

Janek Liebetruh, "And the Shark, he has Teeth" - Brechts Exil in America und Nachwirken am Broadway. München GRIN Verlag GmbH 2007.

James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Patty Lee Parmalee, *Brecht's America*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1981.

Helfried W. Seliger, *Das Amerikabild Bertolt Brechts*. Bonn, Bouvier Verlag H. Grundmann 1974.