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Salem Press Announces a New Addition to the Critical Insights Series: *Critical Insights: Social Justice and American Literature*

Social Justice and American Literature examines the work of Richard Wright, Amy Lowell, Philip Roth, Kate Chopin and James Baldwin among others. Themes that are dealt with include: gender and feminism; gay writers; Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic/Border writers; Appalachian and socioeconomic justice.

Each essay is 2,500 to 5,000 words in length, and all essays conclude with a list of "Works Cited," along with endnotes. Finally, the volume's appendixes offer a section of useful reference resources:

- About This Volume
- Critical Context: Original Introductory Essays
- Critical Readings: Original In-Depth Essays
- Further Reading
- Detailed Bibliography
- Detailed Bio of the Editor
- General Subject Index

The present volume, part of the *Critical Insights* series, examines the nature and significance of social justice themes for a number of well-known American writers over the last two centuries. As our introductory remarks suggest, the boundaries of the meaning of *social justice* have evolved over the last two centuries of American writing. What we now (somewhat) take for granted—that all people have certain inalienable rights to be free from oppression and exploitation—was not at all times in American history the prevailing premise, regardless of the flowery language embedded in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution.

In the **first chapter** in our volume, and the first of four of our more broad-based Critical Contexts essays, David M. Jones addresses the importance of social justice themes to several preeminent black women writers. As he notes, in the immediate aftermath of the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, black feminist writers made enduring contributions to the literature of social justice. This chapter provides an overview of these landmark texts along with a special focus on the political prose of June Jordan, whose literary work was essential to the articulation and refinement of several concepts that are now commonplaces in the language of social justice.

In the **second chapter**, Katherine E. Ledford explores the power of Appalachian literature for revealing the linkages between social and environmental justice, an idea sadly foreign to much of American history, whether in Appalachia or elsewhere. Ledford uses Ann Pancake's novel

Strange as This Weather Has Been (2007)—a piece of literary activism that indicts the intergenerational trauma and the social, environmental, and economic upheavals that coal mining practices when it removes entire mountaintops—as a way to argue that Appalachian literature deserves critical recognition for sustaining a century-long engagement with social justice issues.

In the **third of our Critical Contexts chapters**, Ann M. Ciasullo notes that in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T. S. Eliot claimed that “the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.” As Ciasullo observes, Eliot’s vision of literary greatness is dependent upon the notion of a disembodied writer, a writer who has no body and therefore no race, no class, no gender. In contrast to Eliot, Ciasullo finds that many American writers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries insist upon the role of the body both in the formation of subjectivity and in the perpetuation of unjust institutions.

Kimberly Drake, in **the final Critical Contexts chapter**, discusses the reception accorded Chester Himes’s works by the popular press and literary establishment of his day. Between 1945 and 1955, Himes wrote five novels in the protest-naturalist style. One of these, his semiautobiographical prison novel *Cast the First Stone* (1952), was butchered by squeamish editors, giving the published version the terse and surreal quality of a pulp novel. It was this quality that prompted the editor of *Série Noire* for Gallimard to request that Himes try his hand at detective fiction, instructing him to avoid “excessive exposition” and “introspective characters” and focus on the comical, violent actions of Harlemites.

The *Critical Insights Series: Critical Insights: Social Justice and American Literature* includes critical reading chapters. These chapters cover topics such as: **early Native American Women’s literature, Baltimore’s Fell’s Point, William Dean Howells, feminism, and many more!**

The Critical Insights series is an outstanding, in-depth scholarship by renowned literary critics; great starting point for students seeking an introduction to the theme and the critical discussions surrounding it.

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We are grateful to Salem Press and to our contributors to be able to present to you what we consider to be a thoughtful and engaging series of chapters on social justice themes in American literature and society. Enjoy!

Critical Insights: Social Justice and American Literature

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