ENGL 209  
“Representing Poverty in American Literature”  
Tuesday & Thursday 2-3:15; Faner Hall 2367  
Dr. Shapiro

Course Description/Objectives
“The American is a new man,” J. Hector St. John de Crévecoeur famously wrote in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). “From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labor,” Crévecoeur continues, “he has passsed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. This is an American.” America, so the story often goes, is supposed to be a country where poverty doesn’t exist. Yet, poverty does exist in America, and the organizing theme of this version of ENGL 209 is American literature’s encounter with poverty. Indeed, many significant works of American literature have taken up the challenge of making sense of American poverty, and our goal in ENGL 209 will be in turn to make sense of how—and, crucially, with what consequences—American writers have written about poverty. By investigating a diverse range of representations of poverty and the poor from the late nineteenth century to the present, we will trace the ways in which these representations have contributed to conversations about race, class, and gender in the United States.

Students in ENGL 209 will be introduced to different genres and modes of representing poverty, from non-fictional documentary prose and autobiography to short stories, novels, poems, and even films. Students will become familiar with the kinds of analysis, research, and critical writing that characterize college-level literary study. Students will also develop their writing skills in ENGL 209 by writing a series of short essays and a final research-based paper on the course’s capstone text, Tillie Olsen’s *Yonnondio: From the Thirties*.

Required Texts
*Note: The following list is subject to change.*

**Fiction**
- *Horatio Alger, Ragged Dick* (Signet, 2014—University Bookstore)
- Charles Chesnutt, selections from *The Conjure Tales* (Penguin, 2000—Morris E-Reserves)
- Sandra Cisneros, selections from *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (Vintage, 1992—Morris E-Reserves)
- *Stephen Crane, Maggie* (Penguin Classics, 2000—University Bookstore)
- Zora Neale Hurston, selections from *Collected Stories* (Harper Perennial, 2008—Morris E-Reserves)
- *Tillie Olsen, Yonnondio: From the Thirties* (Bison Books, 2004—University Bookstore)

**Nonfiction**
- Margaret Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell, selections from *You Have Seen Their Faces* (University of Georgia Press, 1995—Morris E-Reserves)
- *Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives* (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010—University Bookstore)
- *Richard Wright, Black Boy* (Harper Perennial, 1997—University Bookstore)
- Richard Vollman, selections from *Poor People* (Harper Perennial, 2008—Morris E-Reserves)

**Poetry**
- selected poems by Langston Hughes, Edwin Markham, William Carlos Williams, Lola Ridge, Edwin Rolfe, and Genevieve Taggard (Morris E-Reserves)

**Films**
- *The Grapes of Wrath*, dir. John Ford
- *Winter’s Bone*, dir. Debra Granik

Course Requirements
- several short analytic papers (3-5 pages each)
- a final research paper (8-10 pages)