

Research Proposal
Swarthmore Summer Research, Humanities Division

The Southern Stoic: Robert Penn Warren's Exceptions to American Exceptionalism

Relevance to Past Course-Work at Swarthmore

During the Honors American Literature seminar I took during Fall 2012, I discovered a genuine interest for the work of Robert Penn Warren. Warren is well situated in the history of American letters, as one of the founders of New Criticism, the country's first Nobel Laureate and the only writer to win the Pulitzer Prize in both fiction and poetry. My final course paper, entitled, "The Southern Son: Robert Penn Warren and the Legacy of Ralph Waldo Emerson" sought to examine Warren's literary theory of history through his most well-known novel, *All the King's Men*, along side his poetry and interviews. In short, Warren's literary themes center on the anxieties that come with inheriting history: the expectations of democracy, fatherhood, and the terrible legacy of the Civil War.

As a student who hopes to pursue graduate work in American Literature or American Studies, I read Warren as an excellent figure for exploring the intersection between Southern agrarianism, historical consciousness, and conservative strands of American political theory.

Statement of Goals

If awarded a Swarthmore Summer Grant in the Humanities, I plan to expand upon my original seminar research by working with the Robert Penn Warren Papers, housed at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. Access to these documents will not only further my study of Robert Penn Warren but also enable my experience in archival research.

I will have the support of an English professor, who taught a class I took last semester. After discussions with the Professor, I have decided to explore the ways in which Warren's reading of American history resists American exceptionalism, as seen in the tragic fall Willie Stark and other political actors in *All the King's Men*.

Importantly, the collection at Yale includes Warren's correspondence with other critical Southern figures on the mid-century American scene, including Allan Tate, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Wendell Berry. Having access to Warren's letters and copies of original manuscripts will help me develop a larger picture of Warren and his shaping of American attitudes—specifically toward the South. These materials, many of which stem from a time when American Southerners were reevaluating their histories amidst the 1950's and 60's Civil Rights' Movement, should shed light on what Warren intended when he proclaimed, "History is Blind but Man is Not." I anticipate challenging whether or not Warren's reading of history and supposed anti-Emersonianism is unique to him or if these sentiments are also applicable to his Southern contemporaries.

Estimated Budget

Transportation

Miles from Durham, CT to New Haven	2011 Volvo MPG	Connecticut Fuel Cost	Cost per 2-way trip	Total cost per week (3 trips to archive a week)	Total x 8 weeks
22 miles	26 mpg	\$3.88	\$6.60	\$19.70	\$158

Meals

Lunch	Dinner	Total cost per week (3 days per week)	Total x 8 weeks
\$10	\$12	\$66	\$528

Rent

Cost per month (1 Room Rental in Durham, CT—utilities included)	Total Living Cost x 2months
\$350	\$700

Total Grant Request	\$1386
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