



# American Modernism and Depression Documentary

*Jeff Allred*

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*American Modernism and Depression Documentary* surveys the uneven terrain of American modernity through the lens of the documentary book. Jeff Allred argues that photo-texts of the 1930s stage a set of mediations between rural hinterlands and metropolitan areas, between elite producers of culture and the "forgotten man" of Depression-era culture, between a myth of consensual national unity and various competing ethnic and regional collectivities. In light of the complexity this entails, this study takes issue with a critical tradition that has painted the documentary expression" of the 1930s as a simplistic and propagandistic divergence from literary modernism. Allred situates these texts, and the "documentary modernism" they represent, as a central part of American modernism and response to American modernity, as he looks at the impoverished sharecroppers depicted in the groundbreaking *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the disenfranchised African Americans in Richard Wright's polemical *12 Million Black Voices*, and the experiments in Depression-era photography found in *Life* magazine.

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