

HONORING LEO HURWITZ'S FILMOGRAPHY

Blacklisted Documentary Filmmaker, Passionate Advocate for Seeing Truth

A SERIES

By Sandra E. Cohen

Leo Hurwitz (1909-1991) is responsible for developing the social documentary form in the early 1930's with a small group of other documentary filmmakers. This creative work initially came out of his involvement with the Workers Film and Photo League in New York City. As a socially conscious documentary filmmaker, devoted to human rights and exposing the fascist forces that undermine basic human freedoms, Leo's early films (*Heart of Spain*, *Native Land*, and *Strange Victory*) particularly addressed these concerns. The House Un-American Activities Committee blacklisted Leo during the McCarthy era for his affiliation with the Communist party and he didn't work for ten years. Finally in 1961, Milton Fruchtman and a small production company named Capital Cities hired him to direct the television coverage of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. The blacklist was broken.

Weekly on Mondays, over the course of the next several months, a series of pieces will follow this filmography. The first three are historical and meant to set the stage for Leo's life and work: Part 1, Leo's History: Family Influences; Part 2, Leo's History: Childhood Memories and Fantasies; Part 3, Leo's History: A Radical Filmmaker In The Making. The fourth is a piece on Leo's two psychoanalyst sisters, Marie Briehl and Rosetta Hurwitz, also pioneers.

My pieces on many of Leo Hurwitz's major films come next and are central to this series. The fifteen films I write about are highlighted below in red. These pieces are based both on the films and on my personal musings. They are my way of honoring the work and life of my great-uncle, Leo. A special thank you to psychoanalyst Arnold Richards, M.D., who knew Leo, for inspiring me, and to both my cousin Tom Hurwitz, Leo's son, and Nelly Burlingham, Leo's widow, for making the films available.

Before you begin reading, I want you to have a vivid picture of Leo in your mind. Here is his friend Vijay Seshadri's description of Leo Hurwitz, the man, from Seshadri's moving memoir of their relationship (2001):

"He had a short, solid body, which combined with his no-nonsense discursive style and his habits of indignation to leave the impression of overall bluntness, an impression mitigated by the look of keen rationality in his eyes and by his

head and face, which were long and carefully sculpted, and would have been described in the nineteenth century as “fine.” But this was just his body. Inside this physical frame there lived, waiting to spring forth, the unrelenting champion of the poor and downtrodden, the immemorial working class hero, intellectual-workers’ division – dissident, disenchanting, morally fervent.”

Leo’s films spanned a period of almost fifty years, from 1932 to 1980. All of his films have Leo’s particular stamp of a deep poetic creativity intermixed with his passion for seeing and never forgetting the truth. Below is a chronology of Leo Hurwitz’s work in film.

1932-1937

- 1932 Detroit Workers News Special, Director
- 1932-34 America Today and the World in Review, Director
- 1932 Hunger, Director, Cinematographer, Editor
- 1933 The Scottsboro Boys, Director, Cinematographer, Editor
- 1934 Sweet Land of Liberty, Director, Cinematographer, Editor
- 1934 35 Granite, Harbor Scenes, Pie in the Sky, Editor
- 1936 The Plow That Broke the Plains, Writer, Cinematographer
- 1937 China Strikes Back, Director of Editing
- 1937 People of the Cumberland, Advisor
- 1937 **Heart of Spain**, Writer (with Paul Strand) and Director of Editing

1942-1948

- 1942 **Native Land**, Editor, Producer, and Director (with Paul Strand)
- 1943 Song of Freedom, Writer
- 1943 Bridge of Men, Writer
- 1943 Tomorrow We Fly, Editor
- 1948 **Strange Victory**, Director, Editor, Writer

1951-1956

- 1951 This is the United Nations, Co-Producer
- 1952 An Evening for Richard Rodgers (TV), Director
- 1952 On this Day, Director, Writer, Editor
- 1952 Emergency Ward, Editor
- 1953 **The Young Fighter**, Director, Editor, Writer
- 1955 Dancing James Berry, with Mura Dehn and Herbert Matter

1956 **The Museum and the Fury**, Director, Producer, Writer Editor
1956 USA, Director, Writer, Editor

1961-1968

1961 **Eichmann Trial** (TV), Director
1961 **Here at the Water's Edge** (with Charles Pratt)
1962 Verdict for Tomorrow, Director, Editorial Supervisor
1964 1966 **Essay on Death** (NET-TV), Director, Writer, Editor
1965 Haiku, a film by Leo Hurwitz and Manfred Kirchheimer
1966 **The Sun and Richard Lippold**, Producer, Director, Writer, Editor
1966 **In Search of Hart Crane**, Producer, Director, Writer, Editor
1966 Do You Know a Man Named Goya with Peggy Lawson & Tom Hurwitz

1968-1980

1968 1970 **The Art of Seeing** (Series for the American Federation of Arts)
Light and the Country, a film by Leo Hurwitz and Peggy Lawson
Light and the City, a film by Leo Hurwitz and Peggy Lawson
Discovery in a Landscape, a film by Leo Hurwitz, Peggy Lawson & Tom Hurwitz
Journey Into a Painting, Director, Writer, Editor
The Island, a film produced by Leo Hurwitz with Peggy Lawson
1969 **Discovery in a Painting**, A film by Leo Hurwitz and Manfred Kirchheimer (completed in 2014)
1972 1980 **Dialogue with a Woman Departed**, Narrator, Director, Producer, Writer, and Editor