

# 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 unresting champion of the poor and downtrodden, the immemorial working class hero, intellectual-workers’ division dissident, disenchanted, 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	<b>Heart of Spain</b> , Writer (with Paul Strand) and Director of Editing

## 1942-1948

1942	<b>Native Land</b> , Editor, Producer, and Director (with Paul Strand)
1943	Song of Freedom, Writer
1943	Bridge of Men, Writer
1943	Tomorrow We Fly, Editor
1948	<b>Strange Victory</b> , 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	<b>The Young Fighter</b> , 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