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Selected Works by Nelson Algren

_Never Come Morning_, 1942, Second Edition, with an introduction by Richard Wright. Call #: Y 255 .A41. Algren’s second novel, written after his tenure with the WPA. Commanding the slang and ethnographic speech of its time and place, this horror-romance takes place among the down and out of Chicago’s Northwest side. Among Algren’s early and most vociferous champions, Ernest Hemingway called Never Come Morning “the best book to come out of Chicago.”

_The Neon Wilderness_, 1947. Call #: Y 255 .A408. This collection of 24 short stories serves as demonstrable evolution of Algren’s literary voice and the essence of his major works to come. These sketches of the accused and abused would prove imperative to his next novel.


_Chicago: City on the Make_, 1951, First Edition. Call #: G 8962 .026 Multiple Holdings. Algren’s seminal prose poem, an ode to the Chicago’s history of graft, braggadocio and the human condition. City on the Make evolved from a piece on the city originally written for Holiday Magazine in 1951. Where Golden Arm confronted Middle America’s willful ignorance of the chronically down and out, City on the Make speaks to a newly paranoid nation in a nascent Cold War/McCarthy era.


Eschewing the novel for travel diary/diatribe, the middle 1960s found Algren dispatching from the world’s great cities on the nature of Americanism, consumerism, and identity. His trade heretofore had been depicting America—and in particular its microcosmic distillation Chicago—in a tragicomic realism. These works show the writer courting a self-referential disassembly of genre foreshadowing literary postmodernism.

Nelson Algren Papers and Manuscripts


Nelson Algren manuscript, published article, and two photographs, ca. 1975. Call #: Midwest MS 69. Original untitled typescript manuscript of an article on “old” Chicago by Nelson Algren, the printed article in Chicago Magazine of September 1975, and two photographs of the author. The manuscript, typed on University of Florida letterhead, but with a Paterson NJ return address, is an ubi sunt meditation on the loss of the old Chicago of Riverview Park, White City, Haymarket Burlesque, and the Star & Garter. Algren remembers fishing off Municipal Pier, Grover Cleveland Alexander pitching at Cubs Park, the great pleasure steamer “Eastland” boarding passengers every Sunday morning under the Michigan Avenue Bridge. Where did it all go? Text includes some additions in pencil, some editorial markings in red ink, and Algren’s signature in black marker at the bottom of page 3 of the manuscript.


Selected Materials on Nelson Algren


This quick guide was created for a Meet the Author event, Mary Wisniewski, Algren, A Life, held at the Newberry on March 7, 2017.

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