Sinclair Lewis’ Interpretation of Fascism and the role of the American Public in *It Can’t Happen Here*

The uprising of fascism in America during the Great Depression was much more possible than the population may have liked to acknowledge. In 1935, the governor of Louisiana, Huey Long, was embarking on a radical political rampage to outbid then-current president, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Long’s dictator-like qualities, paired with his dislike for bourgeoisie society, created tension among those who feared for the coming of fascism to America. Sinclair Lewis, who was among those fearing a rise in fascism, hoped to demonstrate how this type of totalitarianism was completely possible given the current state of affairs within the American government during the Great Depression. In his novel *It Can’t Happen Here*, Lewis attempts to prove to the American public that, under the right conditions, a fascist dictatorship in America was unquestionably feasible. By analyzing both the text and characters of *It Can’t Happen Here* and evaluating fascism from a historical approach, in relation to ideologies about the existence of fascism in America, I hope to reveal the ways in which Lewis uses his novel to mock the political demagogues Huey Long and Father Coughlin—who were running and campaigning for the Democratic candidacy in the election of 1936--while also expressing an opinion about the American public during this time.
To understand fascism and its role in American politics during the Great Depression, one must also understand the type of political religion from which it derives, which is totalitarianism. In Gentile’s article, “Fascism, Totalitarianism And Political Religion,” he defines Totalitarianism as:

an experiment in political domination undertaken by a revolutionary movement, with an integralist conception of politics, that aspires towards a monopoly of power and that, after having secured power, whether by legal or illegal means, destroys or transforms the previous regime and constructs a new State based on a single-party regime, with the chief objective of conquering society; that is, it seeks the subordination, integration and homogenization of the governed on the basis of the integral politicization of existence, whether collective or individual, ... aims to shape the individual and the masses through an anthropological revolution in order to regenerate the human being and create the new man, who is dedicated in body and soul to the realization of the revolutionary and imperialistic policies of the totalitarian party, whose ultimate goal is the create a new civilization beyond the Nation-State. (327-328).

In relation to Lewis’s fictional President, Berzelius Windrip, I found this to be an especially critical definition to consider. In his article, “Fascism as a Mass-Movement,” Arthur Rosenberg discusses fascism as a form of “counter-revolutionary capitalism,” where the bourgeois are inadvertently in charge and supply the dictator with the financial stability needed to rule (146). Rosenberg’s feelings about fascism and its existence as a political religion are presented through his ideology, which states:
When the fog of fascism creates in all countries clears away, behind it one sees an all-too-familiar figure. This character is, of course, neither marvelous nor mysterious, he brings no new religion and certainly no golden age. He comes neither from the ranks of the youth nor from the mass of the petty bourgeoisie, even if he is an expert at deceiving both these groups. He is the counter-revolutionary capitalist, the born enemy of all class-conscious workers.

Fascism is nothing but a modern form of the bourgeois-capitalist counter-revolution wearing a popular mask. (146)

Ultimately, fascism is the exploitation of its mass of followers; it utilizes the worker’s deep hatred for the bourgeois and the banks, while also using clever anti-capitalist rhetoric and irresistible slogans to appeal to the politically inept which are promised a distribution of wealth and prosperity (Knoenagel 224). Rosenberg’s article proposes that once this type of government establishes a stormtrooper militia and begins relying on the active participation of a mass-proportion of the population, they will be given the title of “fascist” whether it applies to them or not. He believes defining both Hitler and Mussolini’s regimes as fascist to be a disservice; while Mussolini established the National Fascist Party in Italy, Hitler’s Nazi Party--principally based on Socialism--was not founded under the same principles. Hitler instead focuses on racial inequality, through anti-Semitism and the extermination of the Jews, which Mussolini never did in Italy. The only similarities between the two regimes were their massive and abrupt following, as well as their military services. Basically, Rosenberg believes that the term “fascism” is used to create fear and power. He considers that, “it is not difficult to see that the capitalist class was never in a position to force its will on the mass of people directly through any violence of its
own” (146). Therefore, the regimes which have been categorized as “fascist” are not actually fascist, but a disguised and more radical form of capitalism, where the government is ruled by those with the most money. Given Gentile’s definition of Totalitarianism and his ideology that fascism is a combination of both it and political religion, I find his definition of fascism equally as interesting in relation to Rosenberg’s interpretation:

Fascism is a modern political phenomenon, which is nationalistic and revolutionary, anti-liberal and anti-Marxist, [organized] in the form of a militia party, with a totalitarian conception of politics and the State, with an ideology based on myth...it is sacralised in a political religion affirming the absolute primacy of the nation understood as an ethnically homogeneous organic community, hierarchically [organized] into a cooperative State, with a mission to achieve grandeur, power and conquest with the ultimate aim of creating a new order and new [civilization]. (329)

When considering both interpretations, I find each to be significant in regards to Lewis’s story. Without establishing a historical definition of fascism, one may consider that it is merely a complete control of government by one dictating ruler. Yet, by providing these ideologies, it becomes clear that it is much more than that; it is the exploitation of a political system--in this case democracy--for the advancement of one which is determined to create a new social order based on totalitarian principles. In relation to It Can’t Happen Here and Lewis’s creation of a fascist government in America, I find the definitions provided by both Rosenberg and Gentile to be important because they provide a context for Windrip’s fictional administration and the policies which he enforces. They also provide a historical backdrop for the fascist parties of both
Mussolini and Hitler—which Lewis emulated to create the government in *It Can’t Happen Here*—while similarly establishing an encompassing understanding of the political system which allowed—or would allow—writers such as Raymond Swing to create similar interpretations of fascism in America.

As important as it is to understand the definition and historical context of fascism, it is equally as important to understand the influences which helped Lewis create the type of American fascism seen in *It Can’t Happen Here*. In his biography *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street*, Robert Lingeman suggests that it was Dorothy Thompson, Lewis’s second wife, who inspired Lewis to consider fascism in the United States. Thompson was a reporter, journalist, and interviewer for many important political figures during the 1930s. After being expelled from Germany in 1934 by Ernst Hanfstaengl—a source close to Hitler, due to a discrepancy over articles she had published about the Führer and the Nazi Party in both *The Philadelphia Public Ledger* and her book *I Saw Hitler*, Thompson rose to fame among public journalists in the US. Upon returning to New York, she began writing a regular column for the *New York Herald Tribune* called “On the Record,” and started speaking out against fascism and the Nazi party on a lecture circuit (“Dorothy Thompson Papers: Biographical History”). As her distaste for the Nazi party began to grow, so did Lewis’; he described the Nazi regime as having a “bully-boy mentality” due to “its suppression of free speech, and its mistreatment of radicals, Jews, and other ‘undesirables’” (Lingeman 393). Dorothy was regarded as Lewis’s advisor on Nazism; she believed that,

The S.A. boys [Brown Shirts] [had] simply turned into gangs,...beat people on the street...and [took] socialists and communists, pacifists and Jews into so called
[apartments] where they were tortured...Most discouraging of all [was] not only the defenselessness of the liberals but their incredible docility. There [were] no martyrs for the cause of democracy. (Lingeman 399)

Lingeman biography observes that, “Hitler had come to power largely because civilized people did not believe that he could and did not oppose him until it was too late.” He goes on to say that “This, of course, is the premise underlying Lewis's title. And his hero admits that it was the reluctance of liberals like himself to oppose them that allowed the fascists to take over” (399).

The biography also provides an assumption of where Lewis’s idea for It Can’t Happen Here came from, based on a story involving Lewis and group of liberal friends. It is supposed that upon a meeting at the Algonquin Hotel in New York City, Lewis proposed the idea of writing a novel which attacked the fascist tendencies that posed the greatest threat to the public, to ensure that Roosevelt won the election (Lingeman 398). While the idea for It Can’t Happen Here may have possibly been Lewis’s own, I find it to be a fair assumption that Dorothy Thompson had a rather large involvement in the matter. As stated previously, she was his advisor on Nazism and the inter-workings of fascism. On assignment in Washington for The Saturday Evening Post, she suggested that she was on assignment for her husband as well, writing to Lewis that “[In Washington he could] get a real picture of the lineup of forces, the whole struggle in American life is visible here” (Lingeman 400). It was also Thompson’s suggestion to Lewis that, “[he] should consider making [It Can’t Happen Here] an uproarious satire,” because she didn’t believe “[the United States] could make fascism” (Lingeman 400). Another interesting way in which I find Dorothy Thompson to be influential to Lewis comes from her interview with Huey Long. During their interview, Long indicated to Thompson that he believed he could beat FDR as a
third party representative, which, coincidentally or not (depending on how it is viewed), happens with President Windrip in *It Can’t Happen Here*. General Hugh S. Johnson proposed in a speech that both Long and Father Coughlin were concerned with, “not construction but destruction--not reform but revolution” which would eventually lead to an “emotional fringe [of] chaos and destruction” (Lingeman 401). Johnson’s speech was later published in *The Nation* by Raymond Swing, which most likely led to Lewis’s ideas about Huey Long and his influence on the creation of Berzelius Windrip.

Raymond G. Swing was an editor for *The Nation* in 1935, at the height of Long and Coughlin’s campaign for candidacy. Swing’s book, *Forerunners of American Fascism*—published in 1935—is a collection of essays expressing Swing’s ideas about fascism in America and those he believed to be involved: Senator Huey Long, Father Charles Coughlin, Governor Theodore G. Bilbo, Dr. Francis E. Townsend, and William Randolph Hearst. Through Swing’s interpretation of Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and fascism in America, I have concluded that he--similar to Dorothy Thompson and Sinclair Lewis--also believed that their rise to power would lead to destruction and turmoil for the United States. Swing defines fascism as “the reorganization of society to maintain an unequal distribution of economic power by undemocratic means” (Swing 13-14). This interpretation is similar to that of Rosenberg’s in that Swing’s ideology of fascism stems from a form of counter-revolutionary capitalism. In his first article, “Prognosis of Fascism,” Swing argues that Wall Street will ultimately be the big business which will rule the United States while political demagogues like Huey Long and Father Coughlin use their financial influence to create the type of political system they see fit. Swing interprets that if the political unrest of democracy continues, and the New Deal perpetuates the
old problems but under the name of a new leader--in this case FDR--then the American public will begin looking elsewhere for a solution to the political turmoil. They will turn to demagogues--like Huey Long and Father Coughlin--to create a new system of politics where the destiny of the United States will be determined by one ruler making decisions for the people. It will be this removal of individualism and civil liberty which Long and Coughlin believe will use to unite the American public as a homogenous nation, eventually leading to the creation of a “new” population to be ruled under one fascist/totalitarian dictator. Swing’s fascism expresses America’s movement from an individual-based democratic system to one of mass-conformity. I believe *Forerunners of American Fascism* to be significant to my thesis because it expresses the possibility of America coming to order under a totalitarian dictator, but also provides in-depth detail about the demagogues Swing believed were likely to lead this movement. By providing biographical information about both Long and Coughlin, while also commenting on their fascist tendencies, Swing is establishing their importance to the rise of fascism in America. Because Lewis had been aware of Swing’s book and the articles being published in the *Nation* (Tanner 60), it is also a fair assumption that Lewis used these articles to create his interpretation of fascism in *It Can’t Happen Here* from the ideology that Swing provides. It is no coincidence that Lewis is satirizing politics and fascism; he was provided the information he needed and felt compelled to show the American public that it was entirely possible for a fascist demagogue to take over the government--all he would need was political unrest and democratic inequality to prove that conformity was the appropriate choice of movement for the American public.

Further support of this theory is provided in “The Historical Context of Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here*,” an article published in *Southern Humanities Review* by Axel Knoenagel. He
describes Lewis’s novel as “artistically weak [but] best understood not so much as an aesthetic construct but rather as a document arising out of and partaking in a historically determined set of circumstances” (222). Knoenagel also contributes Lewis’s creation of It Can’t Happen Here to Dorothy Thompson, stating, "Through his own experiences in Central Europe as well as through his wife's and other people's reports, Lewis came to regard fascism as a potential danger to the political system of the United States" (222). The article also analyzes a statement released by Georgi Dimitroff—a Bulgarian Communist politician—at the thirteenth plenary session of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, which states:

Fascism in power…is…the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist, most imperialist elements of the finance capital…Fascism is the power of the finance capital itself…The true character of fascism has to be emphasized particularly strongly because in a number of countries the mask of social demagoguery has given fascism the opportunity to cary along the masses of the small bourgeoisie who've been unsettled by the crisis and even some parts of the proletariat. (223)

Dimitroff also finds that fascism gained popular support because it “appeals demagogically to the most urgent worries and needs of [the masses]” (Knoenagel 223). Knoenagel’s article provides additional support to my thesis because it also addresses the characteristically congruent similarities between Lewis’s fictional characters, Berzelius Windrip and Bishop Prang, to that of Huey Long and Father Coughlin.

From the historical information provided by the previous sources, it can be concluded that the similarities found between Lewis’s fictional demagogues and America’s real-life
demagogues are no coincidence. Similar to Raymond Swing in *Forerunners of American Fascism*, Robert Paxton, author of *The Anatomy of Fascism*, proposes that fascism is entirely possible and is in existence within different groups of America society:

The United States itself has never been exempt from fascism. Indeed, antidemocratic and xenophobic movements have flourished in American since the Native American party of 1845 and the Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s. In the crisis-ridden 1930s, as in other democracies, derivative fascist movements were conspicuous...Much more dangerous are movements that employ authentically American themes in ways that resemble fascism functionally....In the 1930s, Father Charles E. Coughlin gathered a radio audience estimated at forty million around an anticommunist, anti-Wall Street, pro-soft money, and anti-Semitic message broadcast from his church in the outskirts of Detroit....The plutocrat-baiting governor Huey Long of Louisiana had authentic political momentum until his assassination in 1935, but, though frequently labeled fascist at the time, he was more accurately a share-the-wealth demagogue. (Paxton 201)

While the majority of Paxton’s book focuses on the creation and establishment of fascism around the world during its rise in the early twentieth century, I found this section to be significant because it further supports the idea that fascism was in existence and was that close to coming to fruition in America. From Paxton’s passage, it is clear that Huey Long and Father Coughlin’s involvement with fascism in the United States was, and still is, a circulating theory among those studying fascism and political religion. While Paxton’s book provides a glimpse of these men, it
is Swing’s book, Knoenagel’s article, and Lingeman’s biography which support my theory that Lewis was using *It Can’t Happen Here* to mock American politics in the 1930s.

In *Forerunners of American Fascism*, Raymond Swing provides biographical and historical detail about both Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin in relation to their roles as political demagogues during the rise of fascism in America. Swing characterizes Long as “the product of a humiliating and harsh childhood” (85). His demeanor is that of an exaggerated, overwhelming, loud, and profane dictator whose “enforced churchgoing during his hard regimented childhood may explain his present exuberantly impious vocabulary,” (Swing 86) He studied Law at Tulane Law School and graduated after a year of intense studying, passing his bar exam at the age of twenty-one;

That was the education of Huey Long. Poverty, the want of privileges, the ambition to push ahead, all these are familiar factors in many American lives. But in Huey Long they burned his soul. Those who possessed while he suffered privation are now the ones he is determined to penalize....He is the hill-billy come into power, with the crudity of the hill-billy and his native shrewdness multiplied tenfold. Hill-billies have been the under-dogs of the South; now through Huey Long they are supreme in Louisiana (Swing 86-88).

Knoenagel’s article provides a similar description of Long, characterizing his rule as Governor of Louisiana as dictatorial. In 1929, Long was impeached on charges of ignoring the constitution, misappropriating public funds, and using the state’s militia in an unconstitutional manner. However, his impeachment case was dropped when the senators credited with charging him dropped the accusations, and were later awarded “lucrative posts.” Long aimed for personal
power, claiming “First you must come to power--POWER--then you can do things” (Knoenagel 224-225). In 1932 he established the “Share Our Wealth” program where “every man [is] a king, but no man [wears] the crown.” His plan advocated seven principles and platforms which proposed the liquidation of personal fortunes over $3 million dollars, promised $4000 to every family in the United States and a $30 pension to all persons over the age of sixty-five, set the minimum wage to an accumulation of $2500, proposed the limiting of labor hours to balance production and consumption, and put the government in control of the purchasing and storing of agricultural surplus (Knoenagel 225). Later in his career, Long would eventually sever ties with President Roosevelt and the New Deal. His plan was to run as an Independent party candidate for the 1936 election as a means of taking votes away from President Roosevelt; he did not plan on winning. Instead, a Republican candidate would win the election and take office, perpetuating the economic decline of the Great Depression. Then, with FDR out of the picture, Long’s intention was to run for presidency in the 1940 election as a radical candidate, winning the hearts of the people once again out of their desperation for change. Long was willing to let the country suffer for four years so he could save it (Knoenagel 226). Long also exploited Father Coughlin as a means of gaining followers. During Long’s plea for candidacy, Father Charles Coughlin was a prestigious and religious radio broadcast priest who spread his social resentments against bankers and eastern intellectuals across airwaves reaching, at his peak, an audience of 30 to 45 million listeners. His philosophies have been said to resemble those of “rightest leaders” like Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany (Knoenagel 225). Father Charles Coughlin, born to a family rich in Irish stock, began his career after persuading a Detroit radio station to broadcast his Sunday sermons. It was this first broadcast which catapulted his popularity; he was
“discovering...his own personality as it was being revealed to him by the radio and by the power it brought him from its vast audience” (Swing 35). Although it took Coughlin almost four years to gain national notoriety, his religious sermons exuded political and economic commentary from the get-go.

He found the permanent form of his ‘discourse,’ a rhetorical tirade on political, social, and economic themes, knit together by the social philosophy of the liberal encyclicals of Pius XI and Leo XIII....He assailed the bankers, he assailed the civilization of mass production. He predicted a new war unless Christianity were introduced into the economic life of the nation. (Swing 39)

As his popularity grew, his sermons expanded to ideologies about capitalist greed, Communism, and even Prohibition. The radio was his source of revenue: “if the money did not flow with large enough volume, Father Coughlin only had to suggest that he might have to discontinue is ‘work’ for want of funds. The next mails brought again the donations, big and little” (40). When the Columbia Broadcasting System threatened to shut his broadcast down if he did not submit to censorship, his sermon the following Sunday consisted of a discussion of free speech over the radio. His followers overwhelmed Columbia with their protests, and they allowed Coughlin to finish out his contract uncensored.

If Father Coughlin had gone no farther, had been content to remain the sociological orator--vocal passion brought into millions of homes--he would have revealed a singularly balanced spirit. But he could not stop. He would form a national lobby...He would bring a pressure on Washington that the capital had never before felt...[the pressure of] Father Coughlin...So at last he stopped out of
his almost mythical impersonality of being only name, voice, and passion, to lead an organization. After the election he announced his National League for Social Justice, and with it a platform of sixteen planks. (Swing 43-44)

These sixteen planks advocated the following principles: liberty of conscience and education, a living annual wage, private ownership of all other property and control of private property for the public good, government banking, congressional control of coinage, steady currency value, cost of production plus a fair value for agriculture, labor unions under government protection, recall of non-productive bonds, abolition of tax-free bonds, social taxation, simplification of government, in war the conscription of wealth, and human rights to be preferred to property rights (44-45).

By providing the historical developments which propelled both Huey Long and Father Coughlin to national fame, I find that the similarities between these figures to those of Berzelius Windrip and Bishop Prang to be no coincidence. Lewis portrays Windrip as a Professional Common Man who “had every prejudice and aspiration of every American Common Man....He was the Common Man twenty-times-magnified by his oratory, so that while other Commoners could understand his every purpose, which was exactly the same as their own, hey saw him towering among them, and they raised hands to him in worship” (Lewis 72). Windrip’s “Fifteen Points of Victory for the Forgotten Men” expresses the same ideas that Long does in his “Share Our Wealth” plan, which both include,

- governmental control over the economy, regulations about basic incomes,
- control over the unions, racist and anti-Communist rhetoric, and the call for armament. The program contains a declaration that is subject to change. The final
and most important point is the clause that, if implemented, would make the president the unlimited and unassailable ruler of the United States. (Knoenagel 229)

Knoenagel’s analysis also highlights Windrip’s presentation as barely literate and anti-intellectual, which parallels Swing’s interpretation of Long as uneducated, irrational with his decision making, and against those who “possessed while he suffered privation.” In *It Can’t Happen Here*, Lewis attributes Windrip’s Democratic nomination “not by the brains and hearts of genuine Democrats but by their temporary and crazed emotions.” He goes on to say:

> The conspicuous fault of the Jeffersonian Party...was that it represented integrity and reason, a year when the electorate hungered for frisky emotions, for the peppery sensations associated...not with monetary systems and taxation but with baptism by immersion in the creek, young love under the elms, straight whiskey, angelic orchestras heard soaring down from the full moon, fear of death when an automobile teeters above a canyon, thirst in a desert and quenching it with spring water--all the primitive sensations which they thought they found in the screaming of Buzz Windrip. (Lewis 85-86)

Lewis’s characterization of Bishop Prang, as a fictional counterpart to that of Father Coughlin, can be analyzed in congruency with this passage:

> “All that the Prang who so often crooned about the Humility and Modesty of the Savior wanted was for one hundred and thirty million people to obey him, their Priest-King, implicitly in every-thing concerning their private morals, their public asseverations, how they might earn their livings, and what relationships they
might have to other wage-earners....‘That’s why he’s such a real fascist
menace--he’s so confoundedly humanitarian, in fact so Noble, that a majority of
people are willing to let him boss everything, and with a country this size, that’s
quite a job--quite a job, my beloved--even for a Methodist Bishop who gets
enough gifts so that he can actually buy Time.’ (Lewis 33)

By using Lewis’s contextual evidence to support my theory that It Can’t Happen Here is
a satirical expression of America during the 1930s, it is clear that the argument is not far-
FETCHED. Rather, it was quite obvious that Lewis’s fictional characters of Windrip and Prang are
merely manifestations of Huey Long and Father Coughlin. Lewis’s portrayal of Windrip as a
common man parallel’s Swing’s ideas about Huey Long being--to use Rosenberg’s term--neither
marvelous nor mysterious; he is the all-American Southern, working-agricultural-class underdog
which is EXACTLY what Lewis attempts to convey through his personification of Berzelius
Windrip. Similar to Huey Long’s “Share Our Wealth” campaign, Windrip also appeals to the
public’s emotions to gain popularity, during a time of social disorder and desperation. With
Prang as his catalyst, Windrip sets out to exploit the religion of the nation as a means of
submission by the entire population under one, encompassing religion, while prosecuting those
who are atheist, agnostic, believe in Black Magic, or refuse to swear allegiance to the New
Testament (Lewis 61). In a nation whose population peacefully exists under the separation of
Church and State, I find this religious domination to be a sure sign of fascism. Windrip uses
Bishop Prang in the same manner, and with the same intentions, as Long used Father Coughlin.
Another congruency between Long and Windrip is seen by both men’s use of a stormtrooper
military--the Minute Men in Windrip’s case and Louisiana’s state militia for Long--which
operates at the disposal of each leader; this is also where European fascism comes into play regarding Lewis’s creation of fascism. In “The Historical Context of Lewis’ *It Can’t Happen Here,*” Knoenagel theorizes that Lewis used Mussolini and the National Fascist Party to model Windrip’s rise of fascist power, whereas, he uses Hitler and the Nazi Party to portray fascism *in power* (230). Windrip’s league of Minute Men act as the “surface terror”—the term used to describe Hitler’s Nazi soldiers.

While Lewis’s novel has been the center of much criticism; Stephen Tanner, in his article “Sinclair Lewis and Fascism,” expresses the idea that the success of a story depends on incident, not character, interpretation instead of representation, and politics rather than people (61). Taking Tanner’s idea to thought, it is clear that Lewis was not trying to create an original representation of fascism in America—something critics condemned him for—but rather, his intention was to prove to the Emma Jessups’ of the world that, given the right circumstances—such as social disorder and political or economic desperation—the probability of a fascist ruler taking over the United States was entirely plausible. *It Can’t Happen Here* interprets the way Lewis sees this happening; he uses Huey Long, who was considered fascist during the Great Depression, and Father Coughlin as moulds for this interpretation. The novel is his attempt to make the American public see the dangers in the slogans of demagogues like Long, Coughlin, and other figures (Knoenagel 231) which, not only existed in the political sphere of the 1930s, but could also circulate among politics eternally, waiting for the right conditions needed to strike.

Overall, the rise of fascism in America was much more real than most people expected. While political figures like Huey Long and Father Coughlin were not explicit members of a fascist party, their dictator-like charisma was unsettling among those who were aware of the
existence and plausibility of fascism coming to fruition during the Great Depression. Lewis’s interpretation of fascism in *It Can’t Happen Here* mocked the social conditions and desperation of the public during an era of political and economic unrest. While the American people begged for answers from the plethora of radical politicians cropping up during this decade, it was demagogues like Huey Long and Father Coughlin which caught the attention of many anti-totalitarianism advocates who anticipated a dictatorship coming to America. Lewis’s creation of a satyrical novel in which this type of regime comes power, was his way of alerting the masses—or at least those reading his books—that fascism was entirely possible among the democratic-capitalist population of the United States.

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**Bibliography**


