



Studs Lonigan

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An unparalleled example of American naturalism, the Studs Lonigan trilogy follows the hopes and dissipations of its remarkable main character, a would-be "tough guy" and archetypal adolescent, born to Irish-American parents on Chicago's South Side, through the turbulent years of World War I, the Roaring Twenties, and the Great Depression. The three novels--*Young Lonigan*, *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*, and *Judgment Day*--offer a vivid sense of the textures of real life: of the institutions of Catholicism, the poolroom and the dance marathon, romance and marriage, gangsterism and ethnic rivalry, and the slang of the street corner. Cited as an inspiration by writers as diverse as Kurt Vonnegut and Frank McCourt, *Studs Lonigan* stands as a masterpiece of social realism in the ranks of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*.

Studs Lonigan Details

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From Reader Review Studs Lonigan for online ebook

carl theaker says

Young Lonigan

A good read and complement to similar historical context books of the era such as John Dos Passos, USA trilogy. Gives another and more personal perspective of the same years. Studs isn't your hero type, he's presented with all his goods & bads.

In 1916 he graduates from what we'd call Junior High. His parents are proud that they sacrificed to put him & his sister through Catholic school for a good education. Studs though hasn't learned much and like his friends they all feel they barely survived the Nuns. I found this hilarious as that's what all my college roommates said about their Catholic schooling. Some things don't change.

The author depicts a world where each street is a neighborhood and those a world to their own, that of turf wars and petty crime, standard young man mischief as Stud's wrestles with his teenage angst.

Young Manhood

Studs moves from young ruffian to seeing the light, maturing and joining his father's painting business. Interesting background events are the signs of African-Americans moving into South Chicago, the Jews are blamed for financial ills and the Irish Catholics stick together at least in their hatred of other groups.

Bootleg Gin, sex and the risk of venereal disease are also subjects, I imagine it was 'racy' for a 1930s novel. The VD troubles many of the guys and some die from it.

The Final Judgement

with that ominous title starts the Depression and Studs being sickly from drinking. Eerie predictions and observations on the stock market, which match today's (2002) finances. Everyone thinking, hoping things will get better soon.

Fascinating cultural events - grapefruit diets are big. Studs & girlfriend go to a Dance Marathon. Fun insight into that phenomena. Everyone thinks it's silly, but they watch addicted like a soap opera, or mmm American Idol. (Watch the movie 'They Shoot Horses Don't They')

Fraternal orders are also big, such as something like the Elks, Lions, Masons, etc. Their boom in enrollment is a sign of the times, people bonding through organizations when financial times are tough, a way of what we call networking, feeling a brotherhood.

Bob Schnell says

Not for the politically correct, even though the language and situations ring true for the time. Like Mark Twain, James T. Farrell uses salty language to make the dialogue realistic while not exactly condoning it.

The story of Studs Lonigan, a working class Irish Catholic in Chicago, highlights his life from graduating grade school (7th grade equivalent) in 1916 to his engagement in 1930. A lot happens in those years, over 900 pages worth, and we experience it all through Studs' eyes and inner monologue. Despite his bigotry, tough guy attitude and selfishness, we sort of root for Studs because we are privy to his thoughts which are often at odds with his actions. To use TVs "All in the Family" as a touchstone, it is like "meathead" Mike Stivic writing about Archie Bunker's youth as he imagined it to be. James Farrell gives us an average working Joe but let's us believe that the guy is capable of deep and poetic thoughts. Studs is just incapable of expressing them or acting on them for fear of being thought of as "goofy." Whenever he fails, Studs blames others. Whenever he has the smallest victory, it is inflated in his mind to epic proportions. All the while he is reflecting on nature, life, death and purpose.

Yes, Farrell had a socialist agenda. He shows us capitalism's failures and paints the "Bolsheviks" as poor but happy while those who struggle to make a buck are frustrated, angry and morose. It resonates now as a comment on Trump's America. One can only hope that this time history doesn't repeat and the world can be saved from war and Depression, though the Studs of the world keep supporting the unsupportable.

Bob Behlen says

I don't know what to say: this book uses the words "kike" and "nigger" on practically every page, and the "hero" regularly blames all "kikes" and "niggers" for all of his problems. You keep expecting some reversal of his ignorant, red-neck, narrow-minded point of view, but it never comes.

Although the novel is 'rescued,' to some degree, in the last 500 pages (it is epic), I am still wondering why in the hell it was ever published by The Modern Library. I thought I could COUNT on them to distill the BEST out of classic literature. ... (Of course, they also publish Ulysses, and count it as one of the great accomplishments of Western Lit).

Somewhat incredibly, Tom Wolfe (A Man In Full; Bonfire of the Vanities; I Am Charlotte Simmons; Back to Blood) considers Studs Lonigan as one of the most influential novels of all time.

Influential? I guess that's a little ambiguous (thankfully).

Lori says

One of my great heroes, Studs Terkel -- born Louis Terkel-- adopted the name Studs because he was so affected by this book. I've had it on my list for a long time and have lived the full 874 pages for most of this hot summer. There is so much to talk about. In a nutshell, the book is incendiary; powerful; and eerie in its contemporary feel. Anyone who has ever glorified a past they never lived as being more "moral" or genteel? Should read this tour de force and quickly. They should have their eyes opened to a time that was as squalid and vicious and banal as anything we can conceive today. In fact the parallels with 21st century America are striking. This gloomy decade is, in fact, the perfect moment to dust off Young Lonigan and explore the raw wounds of an American life before the slightly civilized gloss we have constructed for ourselves post WWII.

Studs Lonigan was considered a 'dirty book' when it was written. Typically, it received much attention and mixed reviews. The man who reviewed books for our local Cleveland Plain Dealer despised the book, not because it was dirty (he claims) but because he considered it 'hard boiled sentimentality'. Ten years after Studs Lonigan was published, this same reviewer was still finding reasons to knock it in print! This is a book a reader will either love or loathe. I consider it a counterpart to Atlas Shrugged in this sense...Studs Lonigan is a sprawling work that makes a social/political commentary. In my opinion, the main difference between Atlas and Studs is that James T. Farrell can actually write well while Rand leaves me with a nasty taste in my mouth. (Others will no doubt feel the opposite.)

I loved the book as Terkel did. Farrell's contemporaries received it in mixed fashion. Most agreed that he was a talented writer with a powerful story. Some felt he tried too hard to sensationalize his subjects. One of my favorite review excerpts is from The New Republic, dated 21 March, 1934:

"A distinguished and outstanding contemporary novel. To the American reader who, whether bored or amused, is not self-conscious about seeing in print the kind of talk that would be bandied about in the Greek's poolroom, who doesn't have to swallow his naturalism as though he were taking a dose of castor oil, The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan is recommended as an absorbing novel, a book of significance, a great piece of American Realism. One pushes through it with accelerating speed, unable to drop the thing. And it leaves one shaken."

William "Studs" Lonigan begins life as the favored eldest son of an Irish immigrant who has worked his way up in the trades and become a contract painter and the owner of the building in which the family resides. The parents are a model of immigrant thrift and industry. Though limited in their own education and scope, they have plans for their children and offer them a good home. The sisters take advantage of finishing their high school educations. The same chance is offered to Studs. Studs fritters away his opportunity, ditches school often enough to be expelled and, after a period of loafing, begins to work for his father.

Studs sees himself as many lower class males do. The need to be tough and to wield influence on the street...to boss his pals and to pull as many women as possible motivates him in the immediate here and now. He cannot take a longer view as a young man. He likes money in his pocket and the independence of becoming a 'working man' entitled to his drinking, whoring and carousing as long as the job gets done in the morning. The parents worry but also rationalize his behavior and put their hope in the Catholic Church.

In the first third of the book Studs "has the stuff alright". He is popular with his peers and gets great respect on the street after 'cleaning up' a notorious bully in a fight. He has a fairly grandiose sense of himself and his future. He plans to take over his dad's business and end up well off surrounded by his friends and admirers.

Studs dreams big but lacks in the follow-through. Although there are moments of self-doubt, he has a young man's ego.

Studs and his gang are tough guys. They fight and gamble and drink until they fall over in the street. The gangsta wannabees of the past 20 years have nothing on them. Modern youth did not invent partying or promiscuous sex or other forms of risk taking. Studs and his boys visit "can houses" (brothels) Studs loses his virginity in a "gang shag" at age 15 or 16. The girl is game and known in the community for being an eager participant with the right guys. She does, however, refuse her services to a Jewish boy who has somehow gotten in with the Irish gang. This incident fills that somewhat sensitive boy from a bad home with shame and hatred and he leaves the neighborhood afterwards to go 'on the bum'.

{The story of Davey Cohen is one of the many side lines in this Big Read...as we find out what happens to various friends and acquaintances as they grow through life. Davey's experience is particularly moving. And there are some beautiful passages about his inner life.}

So unhappy that he envied a dog! How many times hadn't Davey Cohen, hungry, cold, knowing he was useless

to the world, walked along the streets of strange towns, envying the dogs that people owned, knowing that the dogs were better fed than he, that some people thought more of them than any human being did of him. He thought of dusk coming upon the poet on his mattress grave, another day of life robbed from his twisted body. Outside, in the rain, dusk came too, robbing Davey of another miserable day. He read and re-read Heine's monologue, and then, other poems. The library closed and the hours had seemed like minutes.

The contrast between lyric writing and brutish and ugly language is pronounced. Studs and his circle punctuate nearly every paragraph with slurs. The theme of neighborhood change...turf wars between ethnic and socio economic enclaves and migration of groups was huge in the 20th century and still causes social unrest today. In the earlier 1800s the Irish, themselves, were dogs. Now they have advanced in the social pecking order and dole out the same rough treatment they received to the "shines" and "Kikes" and "polacks" and "bohunks" they see edging into their parish.

"I never did like Greeks," Studs said. "Me neither. Like that waiter Christy in the restaurant who was a Red. They ought to take bastards like him who don't appreciate this country and send them all back on the first boat. We got too many foreigners here anyway, and that's why there are so many Americans like Stan and Joe here out of work," Red said oracularly.

{The constant use of "nigger" and "kike" in this story can play on 21st century nerves. It is however, a reminder of how this generation thought and spoke. Studs Lonigan was born at the turn of the 20th century -- the same era as my own grandparents. I recall how the old folks talked when I was a kid. Many still used these terms in a very matter of fact manner.}

Studs has a momentary young romance with a girl named Lucy Scanlan. It is the height of innocence...just a couple of walks and a quick kiss while sitting with her up in the branches of a tree in the neighborhood park. The Park seems to represent a place that is other -- separate from the hum drum streets that surround it. This is the place where couples go to walk and to have privacy for sex. Studs feels strongly for Lucy in ways that he cannot articulate to himself or to others. He is mortified to become the subject of teasing after their brief relationship is exposed. He plays it tough and brushes Lucy aside. She is stung and snubs him henceforth. Studs never gets over Lucy and holds her up as his ideal throughout his life. Yet this is a private pain he shares with no one. His friends would not be sympathetic. In the words of one: "Why are you singin the

blues? There's plenty of gash in this world."

Women are broads, janes and bitches--all three terms are employed. They are a source of allure, mystery, confusion and constant frustration to Studs and his friends who see them only in terms of sexual conquest or untouchable ideals. (Sisters and female relatives fall into the second category. Just about every other attractive female falls into the first.) They strive to get their girls drunk enough to 'make' them or 'jazz' them at parties or in the park or apartment hallways. Sometimes they succeed. Other times things take an ugly turn. At an epic New Year's Eve party, as 1929 dawns, the gang goes crazy on Prohibition moonshine and the worst thug of them all violently rapes a girl. This character is Studs' long time rival, Weary Reilley. Reilley goes to the pen for his crimes. Studs falls down drunk in the street after this party and catches pneumonia. This party marks a turning point and an inevitable down fall. Studs sinks into his own abyss of poor health as his family and the rest of the country stagger into the Depression. The Jazz Age is over. The Age of Anxiety has begun.

We are now living in the worst economic climate since the Great Depression. The parallels between 1930s society as featured in the pages of this story and our times are interesting. In one scene, Studs and his girl, Catherine, go to a venue to watch a dance marathon. It is a combination of today's extreme sports and reality TV. The various dancers and couples on the circuit have fans and develop personas to play to the crowd. The crowds are extremely partisan and loudly root for their favorite contestants. The marathon is grueling but the winner goes home with the purse. This is the long shot-- perhaps the only way out of hard times is to take a chance on a stunt or a gamble. Gambling is also heavily featured with pool room betting and bookies taking plenty of action. I can't help but think that reality TV and 'fifteen minutes of fame/infamy' -- even Internet memes...have become the 21st century versions of dance marathons and flagpole sitting.

I'll wrap this overly long review with a harrowing passage toward the end of the book. Studs is broken. His dad is on the edge of ruin...both with the business and with the mortgage on the apartment building he owns. Studs has lost his own savings in the stock market. He is, once again, ill. He is walking the streets of Chicago looking for work. His efforts are painful. The reader feels pity...an emotion the character would loathe. The anger and resentment and sense of failure and futility Studs feels burns off the page:

He had a picture in his mind of Studs Lonigan courageously telling life and the world to shove itself up its old tomato, and let it stick there. He saw himself walking in the rain, wet and tired, with things crashing down on his head, being screwed at every turn, forced to do something. He saw himself walking south along State Street in the sloshing rain, past department stores, past attractive windows full of suits and ties and shirts and dresses and furniture and baseball bats and football suits and feminine lingerie and refrigerators. Walking past tall buildings full of people at work who didn't have the troubles Studs Lonigan had. He looked at people on the street, their faces indistinct, and an unquenchable hate rose up in him, and he wanted to punch and maim and claw them. He caught a close up view of a fat male face,

a sleeping contentment in the features. There went another sonofabitch, another sonofabitch who had a job..

Well, the flappers are gone. Prohibition is gone. Short pants and bloomers are gone. Even the Communists who are idealised a bit too much in 1934 are, for the most part, gone. The world changes. But, then again, it does not. The crooked bankers never really went away (just some of the regulations). The grifters and schemers just changed their game every few years and are with us always. The radio hate speakers did not leave either. Studs' "Father Moylan" {probably based on Father Coughlin} has his heirs all over the airwaves today. We laid off booze but created a War on Drugs. Studs and his friends drank home-brewed poison during the 1920s that killed some and permanently injured the health of others. Today the kids cook meth.

Same result.

If only we had listened a bit to those old folks. Maybe they could have told us a thing or two about some pitfalls to avoid. But we didn't. Studs Lonigan was just a cranky old senior by the time I was born. (Back when the elderly represented the highest percentage of Americans living in poverty; this generation never really did rebound from Hard Times.) But no. My parent's generation were prosperous and on the move. They left the old neighborhoods...and really did not seem to care much about what happened in them after the fact. The Boomers? This is a group that is almost indecent about not allowing the body of the generation ahead of them to grow cold before shoving them off the stage. They knew better about some things and extrapolated this to mean that they knew better about ALL things.

And my generation? Callous as a rule. Not much feeling for the poor. Too many of us were born lucky and think we did something special. We are an overweight, overly indebted generation who is often crowing about 'personal responsibility'. We are the first generation in America (with the exception of Studs Lonigan and his cohorts perhaps) who, as a rule, are doing worse than our parents. We must somehow face the fact that we may well have less to give our kids than what we were given. We are easy marks for the prosperity gospellers, the diet supplement hawkers and the sub prime mortgage lenders. Looking for a miracle we stagger into middle age with no savings and, often, in debt up to our eyeballs, our prime earning years already behind us. The future was so bright, dude. We were supposed to be wearing shades...And punctured hubris in a flabby body, broken down and past its prime is an ugly thing to witness. It was ugly when Studs Lonigan staggered drunk through the streets of South Chicago coughing up his lungs and it is ugly still.

Veronica says

Another triple header has put me a tad behind schedule, but I just gotta say that this one was out, and I mean way out, of the park. I must humbly acknowledge that I had never heard of James T. Farrell and what continually burst from my lips while reading this magnificent saga was "genius". Farrell's work is quite extensive and I will certainly be meeting up with him again after I complete this 100 book journey.

The Studs Lonigan trilogy is comprised of *Young Lonigan* (1932), *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan* (1934) and *Judgment Day* (1935). The trilogy not only covers major events in US history, but also a range of social topics; syphilis and TB, class struggles and racism, prohibition and alcoholism, homosexuality and sexual repression.

In the first novel, Farrell takes us to Chicago's south side at the end of WWII where we meet the 15-year-old Studs Lonigan as he grapples with young manhood. The second novel follows up with Studs falling in with a group of hooligans who call a poolroom their second home and consume alcohol beyond excess. The trilogy concludes with Studs nearing 30, reflecting back on his life's decisions, contemplating marriage and facing serious health issues while the Great Depression rears its ugly head.

Studs Lonigan is a punk, the kind of kid most people would say should be kicked in the pants. He drinks, he curses, he bullies friends and foes and considers women either angels or whores, not allowing for anything in

between. So how can such a character warrant the readers compassion? Simply said, he is everyman; he struggles with finding the right words in various relationships, he gloats when he perceives himself admirable, he envies others glory and questions every decision he makes, and then beats himself up for being such a mope. Studs is the man you'd love to slap, but realize an embrace would be his deliverance.

The hardworking father of Studs, Patrick Lonigan, aka Paddy, is an easily liked character. Even as he utters one racial slur after another, you realize he is repeating words in a rote manner and is what he likely heard expressed by his own father. He believes if he works hard, supports his family and goes to church, all will be well even as the Depression closes in on him. He has buried his head in the sand and is in denial about the country's state of affairs as well as the receding life of his eldest son.

Weary Riley is the punk of punks and makes Studs look like a boy scout in comparison. He is boiling up with anger and wants to take on the world with his fists and is not ashamed to use them on men or women. As young boys, Studs and Weary go at it, with Studs the victor, but Studs believes Weary will get his comeuppance and he surely does, in a shameless way with resulting ruin.

Quotes*:

He puffed. It was nice sitting there. He would like to sit there, and watch it slowly get dark, because when it was just getting dark things were quiet and soft-like, and a fellow liked to sit in all the quiet and well, just sit, and let any old thoughts go through his mind; just sit and dream, and realize that life was a funny thing, but that he'd fought his way up to a station where there weren't no real serious problems like poverty, and he sits there, and is comfortable and content and patient, because he knows that he has put this shoulder to the wheel, and he has been a good Catholic, and a good American, a good father, and a good husband.

A bird cooed above them. He usually thought it was sissified to listen or pay attention to such things as birds singing; it was crazy, like being a guy who studied music, or read too many books, or wrote poems and painted pictures. But now he listened; it was nice; he told himself how nice it was.

He had been sold out, and made the goat. Most of the other waiters had crawled back on their knees, begging for their jobs at any salary, under any condition. Yellow scabs! They had betrayed him, betrayed the cause of the American working man. They had betrayed themselves. The rankling of defeat and disappointment grew upon him until he cursed, using the filthiest words he knew.

He could see the lagoon, steely, dark, glittering here and there with the moon and stars. The World, the night, the park, spring that was going to come, it was all new. He felt as if he were discovering them for the first time in his life, as if the sense of budding things, of leaves coming out on the branches, the gradual warming and laziness in the air, the grass bursting green through the cold, hard, wintry earth, as if all these were inside of him.

The car clattered over a small stone bridge, affording him momentary sight of a thin stream of steely-colored water. The engine emitted a piercing and desolate whistle that seemed to puncture the countryside with echoing loneliness, and he was reminded of how, as a young kid, he had heard train whistles at night, even ducking his head under the covers because of them.

*In gathering up quotes I had marked while reading, I realized that on their own, they may not seem quite so profound, however, the voices that emitted their words delivered them in such a way that cannot be easily

conveyed as mere quotes. Given that, I decided to note them here anyway.

Since you can probably imagine my drooling over Mr. Farrell, it must then be understood that I'd be more than thrilled to meet him. For some reason, I don't imagine he'd be thrilled talking with a dame, so I'd disguise myself as a man, maybe do some sparring and then get a little tight before we sat down to business, and I believe it would be a lengthy and fascinating discussion. Farrell had a keen talent for portraying the darkness found in all of us; pettiness, jealousy, doubt and fear. Its an ability that would sure be swell to have.

My rating for The Studs Lonigan Trilogy is a 10 out of 10.

Mike Moore says

Meet the Deplorables.

Studs Lonigan is a racist, misogynist, willfully ignorant, aimlessly angry, irresponsible, untrustworthy, belligerent, self-centered, bully. He's the hero of this story, and is generally sympathetic. Don't get me wrong, he's a horrible human being... whether he's beating up littler kids in the first book, unconsciously spreading venereal disease in the second, or failing to take responsibility for the mess of his life in the third, this is someone you have to be a little bit ashamed to identify with. That's even before you take into account the overt racism and hatred of the other that permeates every aspect of his life.

Yet, it's hard to read this and not sympathize with Studs. He wants to be a good (read: strong) man, but with little understanding of what that would mean, he ends up a slob. He wants to be close to women, but without an understanding of how to have a healthy relationship he fantasizes alternately about rape and heroics. He wants to be admired, but lacking discipline and empathy, he ends up a bully and a sap.

This may be why some people have a visceral reaction against this book. Here's a horrible human being who you have to understand, and kinda sorta have to like. Studs may be more relevant today than at any time since he was written. He hopes for an American Mussolini who will rise to power and attack his enemies, crack down on the blacks and jews, stand up to the bankers and sissies, and clear the path so that men could be real men. Studs would be fully dedicated to making America great again, if he was capable of being fully dedicated to anything other than his own misery.

Pete says

Broke my face. I suppose, partially owing to the nominal 'Studs,' i thought this was a slice of life depression novel about getting by or not. it's definitely about not getting by, but the Depression is not strictly speaking what this is about -- an old-fashioned, even for 1935, sex-obsessed, violent, crushingly sad and toweringly beautiful work of art. Makes Sister Carrie look like an issue of JANE Magazine. Ignore at your eternal peril.

Ian says

Don't let the straightforward style fool you, this is a difficult novel. It's not the style though, it's more the scope and content. Any readers particularly squeamish about a lot of racism, ethnic bigotry, sexism, and homophobia are advised to stay away, because the words "nigger" and "kike" are not used sparingly or glibly. I will admit that I was frustrated and sick of this book for a large percentage of it, but I know that the end effect would not have been the same if I didn't read it all. But it takes a brave reader to get there. I think one of the most frustrating things about this book is how the titular Studs never seems to learn anything, change, or even consider his situation in a really intelligent level throughout the whole proceedings. It can be frustrating because it makes him hard to identify with. He really seems like an unusually thick individual. But in a lot of ways, this is what makes the book so powerful. It's about a young dreamer who refuses to change and is, in turn, crushed by a world that can't make room for someone so resistant to the serious.

The Penguin edition has a great epilogue which wasn't published with the book before and only recovered a number of years after its initial run. I admit that I only skimmed through it this time because I was MORE than ready to put this book aside, but it's really incredibly written. I need to re-read the epilogue with greater attention next time (not ashamed to admit that I'll probably never read this book again though...).

Christie Bane says

This is a book I had never even heard of before... and I loved it! After reading this book, I feel like I too spent a childhood in a working-class Catholic Irish-American family in Chicago during the 1920's and 1930's.

Let me clarify: not a lot happens in this book. Bill ("Studs" to everyone except his parents) grows up, drops out of school because he doesn't see the point, has a girlfriend named Lucy for like one afternoon and then spends the rest of his short life alternating between fantasizing about her perfection and wanting to screw ("jazz" or "make" as he puts it) practically every woman he meets, works for his dad painting houses until the economy goes bust, drinks too much, ruins his health, knocks up the only other girlfriend he's ever managed to get (the sort-of-unattractive but totally devoted Catherine) and feels forced into marrying her, and, eventually, dies of pneumonia. There's really nothing remarkable about Studs at all. The highlights of his life, at least in his mind, were that afternoon with Lucy and the time he kicked the local bully's ass as a kid. He never achieves anything more than that. He spends his life alternating between feeling like something exciting is about to happen and hating himself for not really accomplishing anything. He alternates between blaming the world for his bad luck and being furious at himself for the bad choices he made. In other words, he is totally, completely, convincingly human.

This is a book about the human condition, but the city of Chicago in the Great Depression years is as much a character in the book as Studs is. There's always an elevated train rattling by or a Chicago blizzard or miserable Chicago rain going on. The novel is like a time-lapse of Studs's nice neighborhood being ruined by black people. Don't read this book if you can't tolerate depictions of historical racism. "Prejudice" doesn't even cover it. Everyone in this book throws around the n-word shamelessly, as well as some other names I'd never even heard of: "shine", "eight-ball." It's fascinating -- a clear and unself-conscious look into what life was like by then, in a time where it was okay to talk and think that way. Studs and especially his father

blame the Negroes for ruining the neighborhood and the "international Jew bankers" for causing the Depression and the Poles and Hunkies for taking jobs away from Americans.

The only people who really come out winners in this book are Studs's two sisters, who both ended up married to respectable businessmen. Studs's parents are ruined, by bank failures and the death of their son. (And you kind of know they will be from the beginning. Early on, they talk about their dreams of going to Ireland for a vacation once Studs can take over the business from his father, and you just KNOW that's never going to happen.) Studs makes a really dumb investment and watches his stock go down, down, down, the whole time holding out hope that it will rebound when you KNOW it won't. Studs's poor fiancee Catherine is left pregnant with a baby and with the knowledge that Studs's mother blames her for his death. (If he hadn't needed to find a job to support the baby, he wouldn't have caught pneumonia walking around out in the rain! Studs's sisters call the mother on her bullshit, pointing out that Studs shares some of the blame, which the mother takes as an unbelievable insult to her dying son.) Out of the kids Studs used to run around with in the old neighborhood, a large number of them die over the course of the book, causing Studs to have a building obsession with his own health and the possibility of an early death. All in all, it's a fairly depressing book. But I loved it because it was REAL.

Jennie says

Meh. Coming from Chicago(-ish), the setting and historical context of this book were interesting. And it was well written. But the main character, Studs, was kind of annoying. And self-centered. And mean. This may be an effective portrait of the slightly threatened, racist, misogynistic white American male in the first half of the 20th century, but, gosh darn it, do you know how many portraits of the slightly threatened, racist, misogynistic white American male in the first half of the 20th century there are? I'm a little burned out. I should probably stop reading them.

Seriously, however, just as our beloved (or not so beloved) Studs begins to show that he has the cognitive and emotional capacity to be a well-developed, compassionate, responsible human being, instead of merely a sociopathic bully and wannabe date rapist, the book ends. It's all very discouraging and depressing. But maybe that's what the author was going for?

I do have to give the editors props for using the word "Comprising" in the title. "Comprising" is an awesome word.

Dave says

Studs Lonigan, the great american dreamer. This character is similar in his abject failures to Jude The Obscure. An indolent and floundering wanna-be. He holds tightly to two fleeting moments in his life (an afternoon with a girl and a fight with a dude). He hopes for great things, dreams about them and gives us a lot of introspection and yet he can achieve nothing because he never does anything except hang out in poolrooms, fight, talk with repugnance and vulgarity about women, and hope that some great thing will happen to him.

This book is stark, dark and dreary realism, set during the great depression, and gives a good feel about the general anxiety of the depression, panic over bank closures, plunging stocks and paranoia over "reds".

Unfortunately, it also paints a savage portrait of the racism and bigotry of those times. It is difficult to read about those events, and yet Farrell certainly doesn't sugar coat anything and since there wasn't such a thing as political correctness in 1934, the facts are blatantly told in idiomatic detail.

Moses Kilolo says

The basic question when reading a book of this stature is whether it's worth the time, the effort and the attempt to absorb it. Many who might have read this trilogy will have different opinions, of course. I suspect some, the not so patient, will throw it at a corner and say how sorry and silly it is. But with patience, and an open mind it is possible to find the gold for what this book is. There were, of course, those portions that made me want to abandon it, but on the whole the book was just one hell of a good journey.

The story, which in essence begins by describing the Young Lonigan, goes on to describe The Young manhood of Studs before it ends beautifully but tragically with the death of Studs in Judgment Day. Studs as a boy refuses to be defined by the social expectations that are a common thing among a Catholic upbringing, choosing not to go his parent's way and become a priest. He also does not go to college, and this is a decision he comes to regret later when the country is hit by depression. His death is so deeply felt, and comes just when he is about to marry, and when the depression has hit the core. He leaves behind a pregnant Catherine, and a father who deeply regrets having to lose a son when he is just thinking of leaving business for him, which in essence has been lost during the depression.

Goes to show how life can be, when we are young and full of dreams, not knowing what will happen to fuck them up or to just shape them into some sweet list of memories when we come to our day of death. But when it is all said and done, we have a part to play in what becomes of us, and Studs chose to fight around – be the local champ, and he chose to smoke and drink, and when the day came, he lay in bed wishing for what can never be done, a resumption of time, for the consequences of what one chose not to be faced!

Kim says

Greg and I began Young Lonigan a few weeks ago. I came across this author's name while preparing for a Naturalism course. Farrell seems to be one of the lesser known authors of the genre. Stusa is a funny character who is easy for a reader to become interested in. Farrell uses long tracts of listed descriptions. At times these sections can be tedious. We both noticed Farrell's roving point of view. The open lens of first perso stream of consciousness effectively shifts from one character to the next. Studs' voice often sounds like a precursor to Salinger's Holden Caulfield.

David says

Studs Lonigan (Young Lonigan, The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan, Judgment Day)
James T. Farrell (1932,1934,1935) #29

May 16, 2009

This has to be the most offensive series of books that I have ever read. The racial insensitivity just kills me. Usually I get fed up with today's double standards of "Racial Sensitivity", and those who know me know that I am not a big fan of Political Correctness in general, but come on. I realize that this was the early thirties, but how a book like Slaughterhouse Five could be banned, and a book like this praised as art is beyond me.

This is the story of Studs Lonigan – an Irish Catholic kid growing up in Chicago. I just thought the kids of today were little punks. I have never run across such a detestable protagonist. This story is supposed to show the degradation of a lad trapped and beaten down by the great depression. As far as I'm concerned, Studs Lonigan was, from the beginning, a lowlife scumbag of a human that could never focus on anything but getting drunk and getting into trouble. He struggles later on in the story to get healthier and clean himself up, then ends up knocking up his girlfriend (whom he apparently doesn't even respect), catching pneumonia doing the only noble thing he does in the book – trying to find a job to support his wife and child to be – then dying. Boo freaking hoo.

The book itself is not that badly written, but it doesn't seem to be written all that well either. So I guess I'll give it a few points for some technical merit, but that's about it. So it comes down to this being a book being written in a forgettable style with a cast of common characters and a terrible plot line.

Not real good to begin with, then throw in the awful racism of this book, and this one turns into a bomber.

2.2

N,J,A,T

Carol Storm says

Studs Lonigan is a novel about a young man from an Irish family in Chicago. He grows up in the days of World War One, becomes a working man in the Roaring Twenties, and dies lost and broken and unemployed in the depths of the Great Depression.

What author James T. Farrell does is to put you into the mind and body of this youth, this boy, this searching young man, this dying lonely victim, as every dream and hope he has ever had is systematically poisoned by the corruption and brutality of the world around him.

For Studs is Irish, and his community is a suffocating tomb, a closed in overheated green house of religious hatreds, musty racial prejudice, stifling stagnant sexual repression, and above all an unreasoning hostility towards new ideas and new feelings. Studs feels that to be a man he must treat women violently and brutally, expressing his desires without tenderness or gentleness. Studs feels that to hold on to his place in the neighborhood he must keep others out, particularly blacks from the South and Jews from Eastern Europe. Studs feels that as a Catholic he must guard against every human feeling that may lead to sin, or even to curiosity about other ways of living and feeling.

James T. Farrell is merciless in exposing the weaknesses in Studs Lonigan. His body is strong, his mind is adequate, but because of his Catholic upbringing he is unable to think for himself, to question, or to grow. At every point the moral leaders in his community are exposed as hypocrites, liars, cowards, and fools. The Irish priests are as brutal and dishonest as the Irish cops and politicians who run the neighborhood. They exploit Studs, use him as cannon fodder in the undeclared race wars of Chicago, then discard him when he is weak and sick and broken and dying. Studs dies visualizing the horrors awaiting him in hell, feeling cursed and

sinful yet at the same time hating the so-called leaders of his so-called religion that has resulted only in his slow extinction as a human spirit.

James T. Farrell is not a great writer. His prose is flat and monotonous, stating the same facts over and over in a way that expresses both his own rebellion and a deep feeling of anger at the waste of life that is Studs Lonigan. Farrell's work only matters because it reveals truths that were banned by the Catholic church, truths that even today so called "liberal" Catholic writers like Mary Gordon, Pete Hamill, Kevin Baker and Anna Quindlen seek to suppress, distort, or deny. They all see the truth in this novel, the truth no amount of clumsy prose or pedestrian dialogue or monotonous descriptions can hide. Deep in their souls they too are a boy named Studs Lonigan.

Cyril says

Who was Studs Lonigan? He was just another tough-guy wannabe who lived in the early part of the twentieth century. He was a lower middle-class Irish-American unable to escape the world he was born to. He was just like millions of other faceless man who lived at the same time. However, there was much more to him than that. Farrell reveals a complex inner dialogue that Studs is never able to really understand or express. The life of Studs is filled with racism, sexism, alcoholism - presented without judgement. Studs is clearly not a sympathetic character, but he is an archetype for many men of the same era.

Pete says

Studs Lonigan just lost a star, because, in rereading it, I found it rather flat. I still think it is a worthy--great, even--piece of American literature, but there is too much telling, not enough indistinctness. In reading Farrell's introduction, in which he states that his original intention was to portray youths without any spiritual grounding or true moral compass, I realize that the book is ahead of its time, as fiction that portrays dangerous, soulless youth plaguing American society is a sub genre of its own. So that's awesome.

Stephen Hughes says

If you're looking to be thoroughly depressed by the actions (and inactions) of an Irish-American loser, then this is the book for you. Otherwise, you should wait until I publish my own autobiography. Thank you.

Chad says

Until a few weeks ago I had not read a word of fiction in nine months. Although this may have been necessary if I was to be prepared for my classes and retain my sanity, it has been very good to break my literary fast at least temporarily. Since I have such poor retention of what I read even a year later, I am going to start summarizing in addition to discussing.

William "Studs" Lonigan is a lower-middle class second generation Irish-American from the south side of Chicago, finishing Catholic primary school around 1915. His mother desperately wants him to attend high

school and eventually enter the priesthood. He does enroll at a school, but does not attend. Rather, he spends his early teenage years smoking cigarettes and getting in fistfights, and adds gin and prostitutes to his list of vices not long after. His primary ambition is to be seen as a tough guy, though this is often in conflict with the growing affection and desire he feels for a certain schoolmate, Lucy Scanlan.

When his parents discover that he has been spending his days on street corners and in the local pool hall rather than the classroom, he runs away from home with a rusty old handgun, determined to make his way as a highwayman. After his first attempt at armed robbery fails miserably, he eventually returns home and starts working semi-regularly as a house painter for his father's business, continuing his carousing every night. One by one, many of his friends die from diseases related to their lifestyle. He has a particular low point at a New Year's Eve party in the late 1920s thrown by the remaining members of his old gang, leaving the party at some point while heavily intoxicated with moonshine, spending most of the night passed out on a sidewalk, and waking up in a hospital the next morning.

Eventually he starts dating a girl, Catherine, and they eventually become engaged. He has saved a fair amount of money from years of working while living and eating at home and makes an ill-advised investment with it. His health continues to deteriorate as the Great Depression begins to hit Chicago. As his stock becomes worthless and his father's business insolvent, he impregnates his fiance and they plan a quick wedding in hopes that their parents and the rest of society will remain unaware. After a miserable day of unsuccessful job hunting, he collapses and never recovers from a case of pneumonia.

Studs has an almost caricature-like preoccupation with courage and toughness and an intense pride that I cannot relate to, though I do very much understand his constant desire as a young man to be perceived as older and more serious than he really is. His inner thoughts vacillate between fearfulness of inferiority and overconfidence in his own abilities and destiny in a way that I suppose is fairly true to life. He and his family also have some very strong prejudices against anyone who is not of Irish ethnicity, Catholic religion, and Democratic politics. The most interesting of these is an abiding hatred of Jews that persists in spite of his sister marrying a Jewish man (who converts to Catholicism). I have never before seen "white" used as a term for only a subset of caucasians.

Although I have spent only a week in Chicago, it was fun reading about Grant Park, Michigan Avenue, and Halstead Street, all places I had walked. Farrell uses a lot of slang, which makes the series somewhat difficult to read until you have enough context to figure out what early 20th century Chicagoans meant. After a few hundred pages, though, it becomes second nature. I am a bit fearful of lapsing into Jazz Age slang in general conversation after reading this, particularly since most of it consists of ethnic slurs that are probably still familiar to the people they were intended to insult.

All literature written during and about the Great Depression seems to be especially sad and poignant, but is especially meaningful during this Great Recession. Everyday working people suffering tremendously because of a bubble from which financial firms profited but faced few consequences? Check. It is difficult to fathom that people actually used banks at a time when they could simply close and take your deposits with them.

The more pre-1960 novels I read, the more significance the invention of oral contraceptives seems to have. How many have an unplanned, unwedded pregnancy as a prime mover of the plot? As mentioned above, I am terrible at remembering these things, but I know that it was important in *Studs Lonigan*, and *An American Tragedy*, and at least somewhat involved in *The 42nd Parallel* and the rest of the U.S.A. Trilogy, as well as perhaps *Sons And Lovers*. I have an unsubstantiated belief that it was a plot point in several of the other books I have read over the last five years.

Perhaps it was just the end of the dry spell, but I enjoyed this more than 75% of what I've read since I started this project.

Manray9 says

You can't understand where you are if you don't know where you've been. James Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* is literature as instruction. It's a history lesson. Our modern society, and the sustained political and social reaction to it, grows from the people and mores of Studs and his times. Many Goodreads' reviewers expressed shock at the coarseness of the language, but political correctness and the acceptance of cultural and racial diversity are recent phenomena in American life. Farrell's trilogy is a first-class example of early 20th century social realism in literature. Another good work of this genre is Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* – which happens to be a title Studs sees at the rental library in Farrell's third volume. Farrell gets Four Stars from me.
