

Week 2 Authors

Mary Antin (1881-1949)

- She was born in Polotzk in the Pale of Settlement, the area of czarist Russia where Jews were allowed to live. In general, Jews faced severe persecution and poverty in this place and time.
- Antin's parents lost their fortune after illnesses so her father left for the U.S. seeking money, freedom and dignity.
- He encountered hardship and later became bitter toward America.
- He sent for his family in 1894, when Mary was 13.
- She understood education as a way to become Americanized and excelled, moving from 1st to 5th grade in half a year.
- She was interested in writing and published her first book in 1899. She was a prodigy.
- She attended the Teachers College of Columbia University from 1901-02 and Barnard College from 1902-1904.
- Believing that religious differences were irrelevant to life in America, she married Amadeus W. Grabau, a geologist, and a non-Jew.
- The Promised Land was published in serial form in the "Atlantic Monthly" from 1911-12. It is accepted as a classic work of immigrant autobiography.
- Her major work (TPL) is both criticized as naïve, overly optimistic, and as praising assimilation; it is also seen as a sensitive story of a Jewish girl's experience in immigration.

Emma Goldman (1869-1940)

- See <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/> for an overview of Goldman's life, writing & views.
- She lived first in Kovno, in Jewish ghettos in what is now Lithuania. Her family suffered persecution and she eventually left for the U.S. in 1885.
- At first hopeful, she was quickly disillusioned by the realities of life's difficulties for those in the working class. Seeing gross injustice she became an anarchist and activist.
- See the following definition of anarchism from her longer essay, "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For" at <http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Writings/Anarchism/anarchism.html>

Anarchism urges man to think, to investigate, to analyze every proposition; but that the brain capacity of the average reader be not taxed too much, I also shall begin with a definition, and then elaborate on the latter.

ANARCHISM:--The philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary.

- Goldman was a major figure in the history of American radicalism and feminism, and an influential anarchist.
- She was an early advocate of free speech, birth control, women's equality and independence, freedom of thought and expression, radical education, sexual freedom, union organization, and the eight-hour work-day.

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- These things were considered subversive during her time. She gained the title “Red Emma;” many in power feared or hated her.
- She was imprisoned for criticizing mandatory military conscription during WWI.
- She was deported in 1919. She then went to the Soviet Union where she was active, but she found that the Communist Revolution was problematic (persecution, starvation, civil war).
- For the rest of her life she promoted progressive social and political movements.
- She was frequently harassed or arrested when lecturing.
- She worked with the first Free Speech League to insist that all Americans have a basic right to express their ideas, no matter how radical or controversial.
- Out of this work came the American Civil Liberties Union, thus the modern free speech movement in the United States.
- “Patriotism...” was published around 1911. She lived the latter part of her life in Canada where she died in 1940.

E. L. Doctorow (1931-)

- A very well know and respected author, Doctorow tends to write about American themes and issues. He’s written several novels and short stories.
- Doctorow studied at Kenyon College and did graduate work at Columbia University. He also served in the Army in Germany. He now spends his time teaching and writing.
- See this web site for more information:
http://www.bookbrowse.com/biographies/index.cfm?author_number=230

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

- His work embodies the American myth of the poor boy who pulls himself up by his own bootstraps to become successful (a typical Horatio Alger story).
- He was born a slave in VA and received no aid from his white father.
- After the Civil War his mother took him to West VA where her husband was living.
- He worked at the salt mines in very dangerous jobs, and attended night school irregularly.
- See “The Struggle...” for information about his hard earned education.
- In 1881 he was asked to found a school for black teachers at Tuskegee in Alabama.
- He worked on this for the rest of his life. He had three goals: Maintain Tuskegee Institute as a black-run educational institution; the advancement of power as a racial leader; publication of his philosophy of African American “industrial” education and socioeconomic progress.
- He became quite respected among both white and black groups, north and south.
- He was known as a realist illustrated by Tuskegee’s goal of offering “practical knowledge” rather than “distant” ideals.
- Where others activists wanted the full rights of citizenship, Washington suggested that African Americans had to prove they were qualified for civil rights by first finding economic success.

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W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963)

- He was probably the most outspoken civil rights activist in America, and was very active at the turn of the century.
- He was dedicated to calling for self-development in spite of intense social discouragement. In his opinion this was how African Americans could survive racial discrimination.
- He promoted exercising of rights through protest and agitation.
- Having grown up in New England (MA), Du Bois experienced a very democratic upbringing in that his town emphasized social responsibility and representation. He was then surprised by racial exclusion when at Fisk University (1885).
- He was highly educated; he went to Harvard after Fisk. He earned a Ph.D. at Harvard, in history, and his dissertation was published.
- His work led him to conclude, “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line”. Feeling his politics limited by small audiences, he sought other forms of writing to portray African American social and cultural distinctiveness.
- He sought institutional structure for effective collective action by African Americans; he founded the Niagara Movement, opposing Washington’s conciliatory posture of accommodating racial discrimination. The N.M. called for direct action against discrimination.
- He became the principal organizer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which included white membership.
- Du Bois became a key intellectual leader for the new generation of African Americans.
- In 1943 he was fired from NAACP for advocating segregation as a way to create unity during the Depression. He became outspoken against imperialism.
- In 1963 he became a citizen of Ghana where he died.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1959)

- She was born in Alabama to a large family.
- Early on she left home to work, having lost her mother.
- Eventually one of her employers helped her find education.
- The 1930’s and early 1940’s marked the peak of Hurston’s literary career.
- It was during this time that she completed graduate work at Columbia, published four novels and an autobiography, and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.
- Her writing is widely recognized, especially her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).
- Her writing career waned when she was criticized, and she died lonely and unpraised.

Mikhail Naimy (1889-1988)

“Look at the fingers of your hands if you want to know how things that are different can be the same.”

- Naimy was born in Baskinta, Lebanon, and he came to the U.S. in 1911.

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- He was known as one of the best friends of Gibran Khalil Gibran (writer of “The Prophet”), with whom he founded the committee of Lebanese Poets in the United States.
- Many of his stories are inspired by the Syrian community where he lived in New York.
- He loved his home country and went for regular visits.
- Check out more interesting quotes from his work The Book of Mirdad (2002) <http://www.essene.com/B'nai-Amen/Mirdad.htm>.

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

- Williams was born in New Jersey. He traveled and studied abroad, but did not emigrate from the U.S. like his peers (the famous poets Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot).
- His mother was Puerto Rican by nationality and Basque, French, Dutch and Jewish in heritage. His father was English and raised in the West Indies.
- Williams celebrated cultural diversity, and his work deals with humanity’s contact with the immediate world.
- He decided for a career in medicine to support his writing; he married in 1912.
- He broke with traditional forms and aesthetic attitudes, and was influenced by Imagists, Cubists, Dadaists, and others (including Pound).
- He was very experimental in the 20s.
- He was widely recognized as a modernist poet. His work includes innovative poetics and is marked by use of the American language and scenery, formal experimentation, varying voice (objective to autobiographical); he influenced later generations of writers.
- His work reflects on the fragmentation and disjunction of modern life.

E. E. Cummings (1894-1962)

- Edward Estlin Cummings grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts and was educated at Harvard.
- He was influenced by new movements in visual arts (including impressionism and cubism).
- He began to paint and write and found a literary style of his own around 1916—literary cubism in which the poems appearance on the page was to direct the reader toward its meaning.
- He volunteered for the Ambulance Corps during WWI and was in France, but was a pacifist.
- His poetry was met with critical hostility due to its form; it is highly accepted now.
- A trip to Russia in 1931 and two difficult marriages changed his perspective; he became more politically conservative.
- He greatly influenced the flexibility and freedom of verse of later American poetry.