



A Literary Tour of the United States

Course Guidebook

Arielle Zibrak, PhD



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1

Hitting the Road



In this course, you'll take a metaphorical road trip across the United States to learn more about the nation and its people, places, and past through its literature. By combining the study of literature and history with the experience of place, you'll make your future travels richer and your daily life more interesting. You'll cover some of the lesser-known history and works of canonical writers like Herman Melville, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Zora Neale Hurston and learn about books that will likely be new to you. You'll also explore the places, people, and events that gave these authors their ideas. Along the way, you'll gain knowledge of the most significant literary movements in the US and start building your own toolkit for literary analysis.



Road Trips and American Literature

Every summer, millions of Americans get into their cars to engage in one of their most beloved national traditions: the road trip. The lure of the road speaks to the deepest values of many Americans: independence, individualism, freedom, and the ability to reinvent themselves. At best, traveling lets people forge a deeper connection to place and learn about other ways of life, and the slow pace of a road trip offers the perfect conditions for Americans to learn more deeply about their collective past.

The most famous road novel of the United States—the one that really solidified the American myth of the freedom of car travel—is Jack Kerouac's 1957 *On the Road*. In the late 1940s, Kerouac sporadically traveled across the country with his fellow Beat writers Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Neal Cassady.

In April 1951, Kerouac sat down to write about these journeys, using a now legendary method to facilitate his stream-of-consciousness writing style. In a townhouse in Manhattan, Kerouac spooled a 120-foot roll of tracing paper he'd cut to size and taped together into a clunky pre-1922 typewriter. Using this method, he was able to write continuously, producing what he called the scroll—a first draft of *On the Road* that is largely unchanged from the form on the shelves today.



Jack Kerouac's a piece of the scroll *On The Road*

But life-changing road trips were not invented by the Beats. Some of the first classic texts of American literature can be seen as road narratives. In 1814, the editor Nicholas Biddle published a redacted and stylized version of the journals Lewis and Clark kept during their journey across what is now the continental United States. Throughout that century, writers would publish popular volumes about what one would find if heading West. Samuel Bowles's 1865 *Across the Continent* recounts a road trip taken by Bowles, a journalist and newspaper editor, and Schuyler Colfax, the then speaker of the US House of Representatives.

Bowles and Colfax encountered new landscapes and new kinds of people: Chinese gold miners, Mexican resistors, and Mormons. They recorded what they saw and heard—bringing back slang expressions like “pan out” from the miners and “you bet” and “on it” from the cowboys.

The goal of works like *Across the Continent* was not only to share information about the West but also to look for inspiration for the American imagination more broadly. A new American literature demanded a deeper understanding of the entire country.

Tocqueville and de Beauvoir

One of America's most influential early chroniclers is Alexis de Tocqueville. In 1831, Tocqueville, a diplomat and historian, and Gustave de Beaumont, a prison reformer, were sent to the United States by the French government to study US prisons and the nation's judicial system. Several books came out of the journey, but none as enduring as *Democracy in America*, a study of the country's political system and society.

Tocqueville was a skilled researcher, but he was also only 25 years old when he and Beaumont made their trip, and they behaved very much like young tourists while traveling around North America. In his letters, Tocqueville describes dancing on the deck of *Le Havre*, the ship they took across the Atlantic, and marvels about sleeping in a rough log cabin and crashing a steamer. He complains that Americans drink no wine but stuff themselves with stupefying amounts of food.

Now, people mostly know Tocqueville for his observations about politics, but his contribution to American letters also includes the popularization of the American travelogue told by someone observing from the outside: full of wonder, danger, and speculation.

Another French writer would take to America's roadways in 1947 by Greyhound bus—Simone de Beauvoir. The 20th-century French existentialist philosopher's account of traveling across the United States, *America Day by Day*, reads like an update of *Democracy in America*. The pleasure to be found in Beauvoir's text lies in how novel the everyday realities of American life seem through her eyes.



She delights in the particularly American institution of the soda fountain and regrets that one can't linger in the American barroom with a book. She tries a marijuana cigarette at the Plaza Hotel in New York and gambles in a Reno casino. She takes a river cruise down the Mississippi, and her account of the river boat captain's commentary encapsulates much of her gripe about the general American attitude:

The captain relentlessly points out the landscape over a microphone. As at Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon, it's a matter of giving the tourists a "conditioned," "homogenized" version of nature through a human intermediary.

Both Beauvoir and Tocqueville are awed by the newness of things in the United States but troubled by the primacy of money over all else. “I know of no country, indeed, where the love of money has taken a stronger hold on the affections of men,” Tocqueville states. Beauvoir paints Americans as lacking in imagination, spending money on things because ideas are of little importance and investing in their cars and houses because they lack a deeper sense of community and integration. “[Americans] respect the past,” she writes, “but as an embalmed monument; the idea of a living past integrated with the present is alien to them.”

Lolita and The Road

To understand how nonfictional travelogues by outsiders like Tocqueville and Beauvoir informed the genre of the American road novel, one needs only look to Vladimir Nabokov’s 1955 novel *Lolita*, one of the country’s most frequently banned books. It is about Humbert Humbert, a French literature teacher who develops a sexual obsession with a preteen American girl, Dolores Haze. Nicknamed Lolita, she is a figure of youthful American culture: the living, breathing embodiment of the cheap entertainments and commodities that French travelers seem to always notice Americans consuming.

In the first part of the novel, Nabokov describes the stifling social environment of America’s small towns and suburbs. There are polite book clubs, lakeside picnics, school plays, and boring dinner parties. But after the death of Lolita’s mother, the preteen and Humbert set out on an epic road trip, which changes the novel down to its genre. Part two turns its eye to the vagaries and delights of the American road.

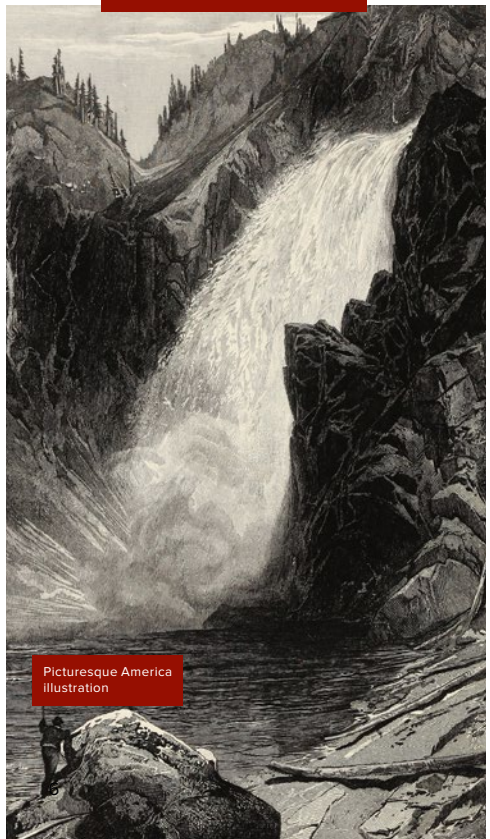
As their trip progresses, the sights and scenes of the American road blur further into advertisement-like lists. Nabokov calls attention to how America commodifies its every attraction. The trappings of its culture become reduced to an almost nonsensical list form, like a pile of linguistic garbage. For Humbert, the European immigrant who narrates the novel, these trappings inspire passion and disgust, shame and longing. He is drawn to Lolita even as he grows increasingly sickened by his own desires. The same is true of

his relationship to America itself. The more cheap goods, tickets to tacky excursions, candy, and novelties he buys for his young companion, the deeper he sinks into his own moral and cultural decline.

One can see the imagined consequences of this disposable culture in *The Road*—Cormac McCarthy’s 2006 novel about another cross-country trip taken by a man and a child. In the book, the protagonists, referred to simply as the man and the boy, make their way through a postapocalyptic America strewn with ash and littered with the remnants of a once great civilization. As they go, the man and the boy push a shopping cart full of materials they collect to support their own survival: canned goods, soda, a tarp, miscellaneous tools. The shopping cart implies that they are performing their own kind of ghost dance, participating in the lost ritual of shopping—the obsession with consumption that defined the nation they’ve now lost.

Their goal is to make it to the coast by passing through the mainland. When they get there, the man dies, and the novel closes on a pastoral scene: a description of the natural world that is calming in its simplicity. McCarthy ends his postapocalyptic road novel with a back-to-our-origins description of life in a stream. He dreams of this place before the arrival of its human inhabitants.

Increasingly, road novels and narratives in the United States are becoming more attuned to how human culture is changing the country’s landscapes. In her 2023 book *America the Beautiful?*, Blythe Roberson wonders if there’s “a different



Picturesque America
Illustration

way of being that involves learning about and respecting the place where one settles, its human history and its ecology”—a question that motivates much of the learning you’ll do in this course.

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2

Poets and Novelists of Boston



With its seaside location, winding streets, buildings dating back as early as the 17th century, and a long history of resident writers, Boston is an ideal first stop on your tour to discover more of the wonders of the United States and its literature. In this lecture, you'll explore how—inspired by the history at their doorsteps—the poets and novelists of Boston have long sought to use their creative power to heal their nation's wounds and celebrate its contributions to culture.



Longfellow and Wheatley

“Paul Revere’s Ride,” an 1860 poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, made a relatively obscure silversmith from Boston into a folk hero. Revere had set out to alert the colonial militia to the approach of the British forces, preparing them for the battles of Lexington and Concord, the first military engagements of the Revolutionary War.

Longfellow first published “Paul Revere’s Ride” in the January 1861 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. By April 12 of that year, the United States was a nation at war. An ardent abolitionist, Longfellow had written a collection protesting slavery in the 1840s. By 1860, he saw that the Civil War was inevitable. His hope was to unite Americans by creating a romance around the country’s shared revolutionary past. The poem was included in his 1863 volume *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, a collection of historical reminiscences in verse structured around a group of revelers swapping tales at a real local gathering place—The Wayside Inn in nearby Sudbury.

Almost exactly 100 years before Longfellow would write his poem, another of this city’s great poets was arriving at its shore. Her destiny would be to create a new tradition of American literature.

On July 11, 1761, the slave ship *Phillis* docked at Boston Harbor, and a 7-year-old girl from West Africa walked off its decks—one of the 75 out of 96 enslaved passengers who survived the 7-week voyage. She was purchased by John and Susanna Wheatley, who would name her Phillis, after the ship, and bring her to live in their family home. The Wheatleys’ daughter Mary taught Phillis to speak, read, and write in English. By the time she was 12, she knew Greek and Latin. At 14, she published her first original poem.

In 1773, the Wheatleys’ son took Phillis to London, where most of the books sold in the colonies were printed, to publish her volume *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. While in London, she was introduced to earls and ladies, counts and countesses, famous painters, writers, and even Ben Franklin, who was there representing colonial business. She also wrote further poems for inclusion in her book. In one, titled “To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth,” she memorably evoked the revolutionary

language of freedom—which was popular with the growing movement of the Sons of Liberty—to the plight of America’s enslaved.

Back in Boston that September, Phillis anxiously awaited the arrival of her books. They came nearly 2 months later on a ship called the *Dartmouth*, which was also carrying 114 chests of tea from the East India Company. The following day, all of the cargo except the contentious tea was unloaded. The *Dartmouth*, however, stayed docked at the wharf for quite some time. On December 16, a group of protestors threw the crates into the harbor as a way of demanding their freedom from taxation without representation. By that time, John Wheatley had finally granted Phillis her freedom. Phillis died on December 5, 1784, at the age of 31. She was the first African American to publish a book.



Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins

From Phillis Wheatley’s time through the 19th century, most free Black people in Boston lived on the North Slope of Beacon Hill in an area known as the West End. However, when ward lines were changed in the 1890s, many relocated to the South End. As South End historian Alison Barnet has written, these South Enders were considered “Black Brahmins,” frequently written up in society columns.

Bostonian author Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins wrote about this community in her 1900 novel *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*. The characters in Hopkins's novel represent different approaches to racial uplift that were being discussed by Black Bostonians at the end of the 19th century. The story centers on the Smith family, who own a boardinghouse at No. 500 D Street, South End of Boston. The stated aim of the boardinghouse is itself one of racial uplift. In real life, Boston's Black boardinghouses did provide their residents with a sense of community, support, and privilege.



Paul Revere riding to warn the Americans that the British were coming during the Revolutionary War

Perhaps the most successful Black Boston periodical at the time was *The Colored American Magazine*, which was founded in 1900 and frequently compared to *The Atlantic Monthly*—the same magazine in which Longfellow first published “Paul Revere’s Ride.” Hopkins published most of her fiction in *The Colored American Magazine*. She also published nonfiction articles and profiles of famous Black writers and world leaders.

According to literary scholar and historian Nellie McKay, Hopkins was committed to

a radical black nationalism that promoted the superiority of people of African descent. She called for Black protest literature, unconciliatory

to all forms of white oppression, and opposed other kinds of literature that did not denounce all oppression of blacks.

Considered radical even in her own time, Hopkins's contributions to the race movement in Boston are still less recognized than those of her male peers.

A Literary Line through Boston

One of Boston's most visible abolitionists was a White man named William Lloyd Garrison, who worked with Hopkins's grandfather. Garrison started the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832 at the African Meeting House, which still stands today as the oldest extant Black church edifice in the nation.



The African Meeting House is only a 7-minute walk from the Boston Common. Hopkins would have been around for the 1897 dedication of a new monument on the Common's northeast corner that honored one of the Civil War's first Black regiments—the Massachusetts 54th, led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw.

Shaw died at age 25 during the regiment's 1863 attack on Fort Wagner—a Confederate stronghold in Charleston, South Carolina—alongside 272 of his soldiers. (More than 1,500 Black soldiers served in the regiment, risking death or, if captured, enslavement.)

The Harvard philosopher William James, brother of the novelist Henry James, presided over the monument's dedication. Booker T. Washington gave the keynote address. The pedestal is inscribed with lines from James Russell Lowell's poem in honor of Shaw, "Memoriae Positum," which means "memory laid down." Both men had attended Harvard, and Lowell was also a member of the Saturday Club, a group of mostly Harvard-educated poets and writers that included Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and others.

A hundred years later, James Russell Lowell's great grandnephew, Robert Lowell Jr., would write a poem that reconsiders the Shaw monument. In the younger Lowell's poem, "For the Union Dead," he returns to the theme of "memory laid down," lamenting how much Boston has changed in the past century and what this does to one's understanding of its past. He wrote the poem in 1960—while watching the excavation of the Common for a new parking garage—and describes "yellow dinosaur steamshovels ... grunting as they ... gouge their underworld garage." This image stands in contrast to the monument and its uneasy history.

Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton

In 1959, Lowell taught a poetry workshop at Boston University, which boasted students who included Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. Like Lowell, both Plath and Sexton were primarily confessional poets, writing lines that sounded less like the formal, archaic verse of "Paul Revere's Ride" and more like natural speech. Their poems were highly imagistic. These images often served as metaphors for profound psychological experiences that reflected the events of childhood or struggles with mental illness. This style was shockingly candid, making big waves in the world of poetry.

Plath was born in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. In her poems, she frequently returns to themes of German history and culture, particularly the Holocaust. Some critics have argued that Plath's use of Holocaust imagery as a metaphor for her own feelings of victimization is offensive on the grounds that it is unethical to equate the mass murder of Jewish people to her personal struggles. Plath herself stated in an interview with the BBC that her references to the Holocaust were her way of bringing the political to bear on personal poetry, a recognition of the universality of suffering.

Anne Sexton was the first woman to be awarded membership into the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard. Since then, many women poets have become members. In Sexton's work—as in Lowell's and Plath's—personal history vanishes, taking with it the history of place. But image remains.

Like Plath and Lowell, Anne Sexton lived with mental illness—both Plath and Sexton would die young by suicide. Still, their poetry continues to influence readers and poets. In this regard, the confessional poets taught readers what their personal experiences of place can reveal about history. The continued fame of Plath and Sexton is even more significant when considered within the context of American poetry at the time of their careers.

Sexton described the frustration of “kicking at the door of fame that men run and own and won't give us the password for.” Plath and Sexton succeeded in kicking that door down—not only for themselves but also for the many female poets who came after.

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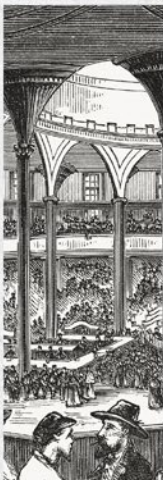
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3

Transcendentalism in New England



According to influential poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American scholar was self-made and self-directed, led by nature, action, and imagination. Emerson's ideas would eventually become a full-fledged ideological movement, one that began with an informal social club of Boston's leading intellectuals known as the Transcendental Club. The transcendentalists believed in the sanctity of nature and the power of the individual human spirit to change the world. They were nonconformists who created experimental living communities and published some of the century's most controversial ideas in their renegade journal, *The Dial*. In this lecture, after a brief pitstop in Amherst, you'll follow the emergence of transcendentalism at Harvard University and its development in Concord—a small town that's been home to a number of literary giants, including most of the nation's transcendentalist poets and philosophers.



Emily Dickinson and the Transcendental Self

Concord is one of America's most literary towns, but Massachusetts is also home to another: Amherst, about 90 miles west of Boston. And the most visited home in Amherst belongs to one of the United States' most beloved poets and a transcendentalist of her own brand: Emily Dickinson.



Dickinson has often been portrayed as a recluse locked in her childhood bedroom with little experience of the outside world. While it is true that she remained almost completely unpublished in her own lifetime, never married, and resided at her parents' home until her death, Dickinson's early life was taken up with the intellectual, technological, and social developments of her world.

One of the chief concerns of Dickinson's poetry—beyond the unceasing wonders of the natural world—is the problem of selfhood, an issue that also occupied the transcendentalists. She describes the self as an impenetrable barrier that prevents people from ever really knowing one another. Her solitude is not the loneliness of a woman confined to a bedroom but the existential questioning of a philosopher-poet reckoning with the central

condition of human life. Her rejection of somebody-ness here is not a self-annihilation but more of a protest against the demands of selfhood within the highly restrictive society of 19th-century New England.

The self was a chief concern for the transcendentalists, and though they were practically obsessed with being unique and original, they were largely influenced by the English Romantic poets who came before them.

In 1798, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published the groundbreaking collection *Lyrical Ballads*. This volume included a preface expressing the poets' desire to speak to ordinary people using ordinary words. They emphasized their belief that a poet's truth is to be found within the self rather than the stuffy language and ideas of previous poetic and philosophical works. This idea may seem simple, but, at the time, the notion of a poetry for the people and about the people was practically unheard of.

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller

Two years after the death of his wife in 1831, a grieving Ralph Waldo Emerson did what any 29-year-old in his situation with time and means would do—set off on a European adventure. His primary goal was to meet his heroes: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Scottish philosopher and literary critic Thomas Carlyle.

Emerson's visit with Coleridge in London was a disappointment, but he had greater success in his meeting with Wordsworth. And on visiting Carlyle, Emerson found a kindred spirit. The two would correspond throughout their lives. They were both idealists who disdained the hyperrationality of previous metaphysical philosophy.

Emerson returned to the United States at the end of 1833 full of new ideas about how intellectual life in the country should proceed. His conversations with Carlyle and Wordsworth set off his desire to create a rural outpost where men of ideas could think and write in tranquility, surrounded by likeminded neighbors.



In 1834, Emerson moved to Concord, Massachusetts, 26 miles outside of Boston. In 1835, he remarried and bought a house at 18 Cambridge Turnpike. He christened the house “Bush” and remained there for the rest of his life, hosting a seemingly endless conversation with a rotating cast of visiting poets, philosophers, artists, and novelists.

Among Emerson’s many visitors at Bush were the members of the Transcendental Club. One member had moved to Concord because she was keen both to forge a friendship with Emerson and to make her own mark on the world. She was Margaret Fuller, whose translations and essays on German philosophy would profoundly impact her transcendentalist peers. However, her 1845 manifesto *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is even more enduring. Originally an article printed in the transcendentalist magazine *The Dial* in 1843, Fuller’s work demanded that women be given the same educational and professional opportunities as their male counterparts. In fact, from 1840 to 1842, Fuller was editor of *The Dial*, and under her editorship, the number of female-authored poems published in the magazine soared.

Louisa May Alcott

Another writer from Concord who would go on to great fame was Louisa May Alcott. Louisa’s father, Amos Bronson Alcott—who went by Bronson—was a member of the Transcendental Club, a close friend of Emerson’s, and an

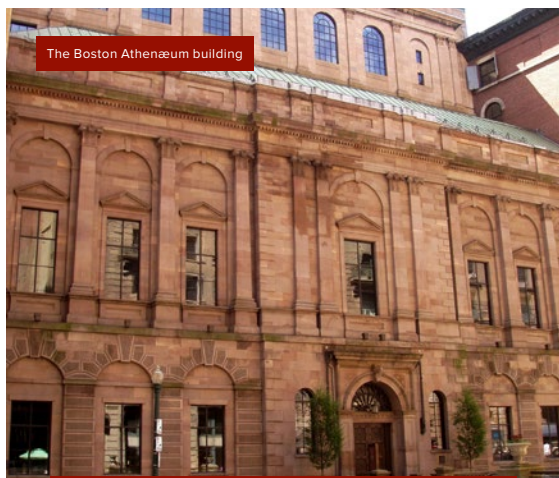
experimental educator. And it was about their time at their Concord home, Orchard House, that Alcott wrote the novel that would lift her family out of poverty: *Little Women*.

Louisa May's writings would express harder truths and realities than the esoteric writings of her father and his philosophical peers. But part of the appeal of *Little Women* lies in its connection to the real lives of the Alcott family.

Though *Little Women* is known for being a tear-jerker, mostly due to the scene in which Beth dies of scarlet fever, many details of the Alcotts' lives were even bleaker than the novel. As Bronson's ventures rarely amounted to any financial gain and the other Alcott women had little means of supporting themselves or each other, Louisa worked constantly to clothe and feed the family from a young age—and not only by her pen.

Louisa's 1873 novel *Work: A Story of Experience* describes her character Christie's history of employment, which mirrors her own. Christie works as a servant, an actress, a governess, a companion, a seamstress, and an army nurse—all jobs Louisa herself held. She had previously expanded upon her nursing experiences in her 1863 account *Hospital Sketches*, where she describes not only the harrowing visions of war but also the grim realities of cleaning and caring for soldiers with little help and few supplies. It remains one of the most valuable realistic firsthand accounts of the labor of women in the American Civil War.

After the war, Louisa moved to Boston. The location of her house on Beacon Hill was particularly favorable to Louisa, as it was just a short walk along the Common to the Boston Athenæum, a private library where she did most of her reading.



Founded in 1807, the Boston Athenæum was created by a group of Bostonians who produced a magazine called *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review*. By 1851, it had become one of the largest libraries in the United States.

William Dean Howells

The Boston-based author and editor William Dean Howells would write in his reminiscences, “I can only recall my breathless first sight of the Public Library and of the Athenæum Gallery: great sights then, which the Vatican and the Pitti hardly afterwards eclipsed for mere emotion.”

Howells’s own first verses were published alongside Louisa May Alcott’s *Hospital Sketches* in the abolitionist newspaper *The Boston Commonwealth* in 1863. At the time, Howells was on his own European journey. However, in 1866, he and his wife, Elinor, would move to Cambridge, where he would write for a number of magazines. In the 1880s, he wrote several novels set in Boston that exemplified a movement he would play a large part in defining: literary realism.

Howells’s best-known work is 1885’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, which follows a Vermont-born paint manufacturer who struggles to learn the social mores of high society Boston. The Laphams are eager to establish themselves in the right social group to ensure good matches for their marriage-ready daughters, Irene and Penelope.

At the beginning of the novel, the Laphams live in the South End, but they quickly realize their error in having settled there. In an effort to raise their standing, Silas begins building a massive new mansion in the Back Bay as well.

In the 1880s, the Back Bay was still a brand-new, almost uninhabited neighborhood. Construction there had begun in 1859, but prior to that time, it was an actual bay—a basin of the Charles River where the Massachusetts and Wampanoag tribes once fished. The construction project enlarged Boston’s area by almost 60%. The architects who designed the project modeled their plans on the city of Paris and created a scheme of wide

boulevards, green spaces, and narrow back alleyways so that wealthy residents needn't be exposed to servants entering and exiting or the noise and mess of coal and food deliveries.

Howells was enchanted by the metaphorical possibilities of these new architectural developments. *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is ultimately about the failure of rural Americans like Silas to adapt to the fast ways of commerce in the modern urban space, where the lives of citizens and their roles in the greater machinery of the city are as segregated as the boulevards and the alleyways.

While Howells found success as a novelist, his real mark on American literature would be made as editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*. In this position, Howells would usher in a new generation of realist writers, bringing the same passion for the representation of people's everyday lives and troubles to fiction that Emerson had so valued in poetry. The genre of realism dealt primarily with the lives of those in the country's rapidly expanding cities. It would find its greatest writers in New York, a city to which Howells himself would move permanently in the early 1890s.

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4

Wild Spaces of New England



Perhaps the most beloved writer of the American transcendental movement is Henry David Thoreau. In this lecture, you'll dig into Thoreau's work, which is devoted to the topic he held most dear—New England's wildest spaces. In doing so, you'll explore how New England authors grappled with the complex distinctions between the wild and the civilized in American culture, in addition to how writers who took up such concerns worried about the increasing acquisitiveness of average Americans and the quickly vanishing natural areas of the nation.



Thoreau at Walden Pond and Cape Cod

Thoreau's most famous work, *Walden*, chronicles his experience living on Ralph Waldo Emerson's property at the shores of Walden Pond in Concord. Walden Pond is a kettle lake, formed as glaciers melted thousands of years ago, meaning that it's both exceptionally deep and clear. Thoreau erected a cabin there in 1845.

Thoreau's *Walden* inaugurated an entire genre of nature and conservation writing. Yet, many contemporary readers and students like to point out Thoreau's privilege and the relative lack of hardship in his adventure at Walden. He came from a well-known family in town—his father had a lucrative pencil factory—and he was able to stay on a friend's land, borrow a friend's axe, and accept foodstuffs from visiting guests. His trip to Walden certainly wasn't an extreme wilderness challenge, but it was an important writerly experiment that generated some of the most enduring reflections on American culture within the period.

Thoreau didn't know what he'd write about when he set out. He sought to determine what life would feel like if its daily conventions were stripped away. He was tired of the concerns of his Concord neighbors, toiling day after day to pay off their mortgages and to buy fancy things that, by his estimation, they didn't really need. In his work, Thoreau thinks deeply about the sensory pleasures afforded by the natural world rather than the manufactured one.

In his other, lesser-known works, he explores the wilderness around him in prose that measures the exacting observations of the skilled naturalist against the wandering reflections of the transcendental philosopher.

Almost a decade after he left his cabin at Walden Pond, Thoreau began publishing his series *Cape Cod*, which was later published in book form. It describes the walk he took with his friend William Ellery Channing down the 30 miles of uninterrupted shoreline that flank the curled little arm of Massachusetts. Thoreau was enchanted by the variety of marine life and awed by the spectacular cliff-like dunes in Truro and Wellfleet. Though *Cape Cod* was considered a largely unsettled and desolate place in Thoreau's lifetime, he accurately foretold its future as a vacation destination for the wealthy.



A line of sand dunes near Truro
on Massachusetts' Cape Cod

However, for many writers, the biggest draw of Cape Cod's famed Provincetown—right at the tip of the little curl—has been its wild, grassy dunes and the crashing waves below. The poet Mary Oliver lived on the east end of Commercial Street in Provincetown for 50 years. Residents remember her daily 5 am walks along the Province Lands trail, a 5.5-mile path that winds through sandy dunes, pine forests, kettle lakes, and cranberry bogs. She writes of driving home to Provincetown from Boston—along Thoreau's route—and observes how this view is one “that cannot cherish us,” but that does not mean that people cannot cherish it.

The nature writing of New England reminds people that they live to exist within nature, not to control it. The ethics of living harmoniously with Earth is a common theme of some of the best writers of this region.

Herman Melville and *Moby-Dick*

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* is one of the most finely wrought American novels, but it is also a valuable resource for learning about the life and culture of the sailors who set out on the greatest frontier the Eastern part of the country had to offer—the Atlantic Ocean.

The novel's protagonist, Ishmael, heads out to sea in a parallel journey to Thoreau's treks overland. Both seek to encounter adventure and to distance themselves from the worldly concerns of "civilized" men. The word *civilized* itself is a point of tension in *Moby-Dick*, as is the word *wild*. Melville is clearly making the distinctions between the civilized and uncivilized worlds as slippery as a deck in a storm.

Moby-Dick begins in New Bedford, just south of Cape Cod. After arriving at the Spouter-Inn too late to find a room, Melville's hero Ishmael agrees to share a bed with a harpooner named Queequeg. Ishmael has his fair share of encounters with drunken Christians in New Bedford, which at the time rivaled Nantucket for the whaling capital of the world.

Ishmael is awed by the diversity of the crowd at New Bedford, where the darker-skinned harpooners—sometimes in the dress of their cultures back home in Africa or the Caribbean—mingled with the "hayseed" farmers from New Hampshire or Vermont who would accept less dangerous roles on the ship. Ishmael is also fond of the thoroughness of the marine aesthetic he encounters everywhere he looks. Even the humble church he visits, the Whaleman's Chapel, possesses a curious pulpit that is shaped like the bow of a ship, which the minister must ascend and descend using ship's ropes and ladders.

The Whaleman's Chapel was based on an actual church that still stands in New Bedford today—the Seamen's Bethel. Sailors in Melville's time would visit to pray for a safe passage, and one can still see the memorial plaques to those lost at sea that Melville describes in his novel.

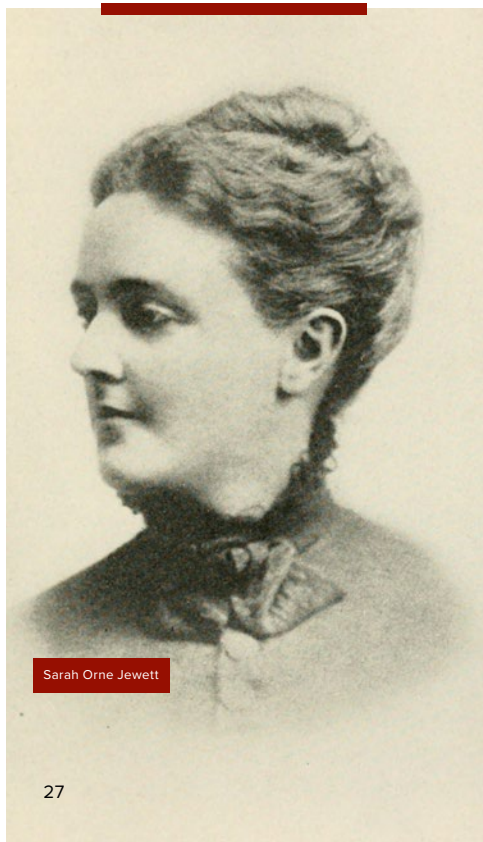
If one wants to learn more about the 19th-century whaling industry that *Moby-Dick* animates, they can head across the street to the New Bedford Whaling Museum. The museum's collection has grown to more than 1 million items related to the international whaling industry and its impact on the culture of the region, including whaling log books, navigational instruments, and scrimshaw—engraved pictures on whale ivory and other hard animal matter. The museum is well worth a visit to learn about the industry that supplied the Western world with light for more than 300 years.

After Queequeg and Ishmael make their way to Nantucket, they are steered by a chowder recommendation from their former landlord at the Spouter-Inn. They head to the Try Pots tavern, where they are offered the choice of clam or cod chowder. Melville's addition of an entire—albeit short—chapter on the relative merits of different chowder haunts on the Northeast Seaboard was a joking response to the kinds of foodie battles that even 19th-century sailors weren't exempt from. It's also a further nod to the pettiness of the so-called civilized world.

In sea stories by Melville and other writers in the period, the land often emerges as the symbol of safety and civilization, while the sea figures as the site of wild conquest, adventure, and danger. But many other New England writers, like Thoreau, found as much wildness ashore as they did upon the waves.

Regionalism, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Robert Frost

In the late 19th century, regionalist writers would popularize tales about New England that emphasized its powerful connection to both land and sea. Regionalism was a late 19th-century movement in American literature that introduced readers to the particularities of some of the United States' least-visited corners. Regionalist writers published stories in mainstream magazines that painted



Sarah Orne Jewett

picturesque landscapes, rendered dialogue in unfamiliar dialectics, and addressed localized social problems previously unknown to outsiders. Many of these writers were women.

One of the best is Sarah Orne Jewett. The 18th-century farmhouse where Jewett's grandparents lived in the coastal town of South Berwick in Maine served as the base for her own explorations of the region. She inherited it after her grandparents died and continued to visit in the summers with her partner, Annie Fields. It's a museum now and a good jumping-off point for exploring the environs as Jewett did.

Jewett's tales are dominated by the human consequences of whaling and international trade. They are also suffused with a deep love for the natural world, evident in one of her most famous short stories, "A White Heron." The story follows Sylvia, a "country child" who is "afraid of folks." She much prefers the company of squirrels and birds—even of her grandmother's stubborn milk cow, prone to wandering into the woods. Looking for the cow, Sylvia encounters a strange hunter. She and her grandmother learn he's an ornithologist, looking for an elusive white heron to add to his collection of stuffed specimens. Sylvia knows where the heron lives and is tempted by the hunter's bribe of \$10 to help find it. She develops a crush on him but still can't betray the bird.

Jewett's way of reminding her readers of the value of animal life is celebrating a human figure who makes a sacrifice for it. By drawing readers into Sylvia's story, Jewett is also a friend to the birds.

Many years later, the poet Robert Frost would also come to prefer the company of birds to hunters. Poets before him had written of symbolic or archetypal birds, but Frost's birds impact him in the physical world and illuminate it to him anew. For example, in his poem "A Minor Bird," the narrator's annoyance at birdsong triggers a potent reminder that the woods belong as much to birds as they do to people. All of its dwellers have a right to sing if they please.

While Frost is primarily celebrated as a nature poet and his words frequently grace greeting cards and serene posters, beneath his view of the natural world was an acknowledgment of the brutality of human beings in their relentless desire to control it. He believed in poems because they were songs made of a human thing—language—that nevertheless contained a trace of wildness.

Writers like Thoreau, Melville, Oliver, Jewett, and Frost sought wild places and experiences as well as new ways of expression that contained some of nature's unruly wonder. Strolling through their woods and along their dunes and swimming in their waters, one might find a piece of that wonder, just as one sees it on the page.

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5

New York's Elites



The tension between so-called civilized spaces and the wilderness appears in some of America's best literature about one of its most settled cities: New York. In this, the first of three lectures on New York, you'll look at how writers like Washington Irving, Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Truman Capote charted the growth and expansion—both spatial and social—of New York City. By homing in on the competitive avenues of Manhattan, you'll learn about and explore literature that both idolizes and criticizes the excesses of city life.



Washington Irving

The first real best-selling work about Manhattan was a satirical history published in 1809 by Washington Irving titled *A History of New York, from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*. In writing it pseudonymously as Diedrich Knickerbocker, Irving created a scandal in his own time and a word for Dutch-descended New Yorkers—Knickerbockers—that would have some real sticking power in the cultural lexicon.

Born in lower Manhattan to Scottish immigrants, Irving was a true son of Manhattan who nonetheless delighted in mocking the pretenses of its more self-serious residents. Two years before the publication of his first book, Irving and his friends had started a humor magazine called *Salmagundi*, which provided a glimpse into the baroque social rules and customs of the New Yorkers who believed themselves to be the epicenter of the civilized world. *Salmagundi* was also where Irving coined the city's nickname Gotham—from an old Dutch word that meant “City of Goats”—as part of his mockery.

In this sense, the snobbery of elite New Yorkers was bound up with the literary mockery of their pretense from the very beginning. Even some of the most serious literary works about Manhattan are as invested in taking these elites down a notch as in chronicling their rich—in more ways than one—history. Such a dichotomy highlights one of New York City's central



contradictions: It's supposedly the place where anyone can make it big, but wealth and connections have long been nonnegotiable ingredients for social and professional success in the city.

Edith Wharton

With direct lineage she could trace back to New Amsterdam's earliest Dutch settlers, Edith Wharton was from a family firmly established as Knickerbockers—a term that, by the middle of the 19th century, had become a point of pride among the same people Irving had invented it to mock. Another way to refer to this group of elite New Yorkers was The Four Hundred, a reference to the number of people who could fit in the ballroom of the Astor mansion on Fifth Avenue.

The target of Wharton's sharply ironic fiction would be both these snobbish Knickerbockers she grew up around and the new money families they despised. Wharton dubbed this latter group “the invaders” in her fiction. Her language curiously turns the language of conquest away from the original seizure of the land from its native inhabitants—the Lenape, who called the area Mannahatta in the first place. When Wharton writes of the Knickerbocker descendants of the old Dutch settlers as new natives experiencing their own



Edith Wharton

colonization at the hands of so-called invaders, she is making a larger point about how New Yorkers have long leveraged, and contorted, history to buoy their own sense of superiority.

Wharton's 1913 novel *The Custom of the Country* not only draws attention to the Knickerbockers' hypocritical claim to a land that was not really theirs but also highlights the tenuous nature of their reign. It tracks the staunch values of these old New Yorkers with a wry air of knowledge that the customs of their country will not continue to be upheld as the city grows and changes.

***The Age of Innocence* and Social Climbing**

Marrying out and moving uptown were themes that dominated Edith Wharton's novels. A set of characters in her fiction—the Mingotts—are bastions of Old New York who find themselves diversifying as they marry outside of their clan. Catherine Mingott is the matriarch of the family in *The Age of Innocence*, which was published in 1920 but is set in the Manhattan of the 1870s. Catherine Mingott's power and status allow her to make a decision that would have been scandalous for anyone else in her set: She leaves what *The Custom of the Country* character Ralph Marvell calls “the reservation” to build a mansion uptown.

Wharton based Catherine Mingott on her own legendary family matriarch, Mary Mason Jones, who left Washington Square to become a pioneer of Marble Row—a new central location for the wealthy and fashionable. Mary Mason Jones's mansion would soon be joined by even grander monstrosities. The marble Vanderbilt mansion, an edifice that dwarfed the Jones place, would spring up right across Fifth Avenue in 1883. That year, Alva Vanderbilt, the daughter of an Alabama cotton merchant, would invite 1,200 guests to her fancy-dress ball. It was the first public opening of her new house across from Marble Row.

But the Vanderbilts were not the social climbers that most riled the likes of Mary Mason Jones. That honor would fall to a woman who some claimed had the greatest hand in opening up Knickerbocker society to wealthy, self-made newcomers from out of town: Marietta Stevens—who was married to a dry goods merchant turned wealthy hotelier.

Marietta is satirized in *The Age of Innocence* as the tacky social climber Mrs. Lemuel Struthers. Associating with Mrs. Struthers is one of several irretrievable social errors made by the novel's heroine, Ellen Olenska, a daughter of Knickerbocker society who has long lived in Europe and forgotten the strict rules of Old New York.

As *The Age of Innocence* charts the changing landscape of New York society, it also charts the changing landscape of the city. Its protagonist, Newland Archer, chooses between his intended bride—May Welland of Washington Square—and Ellen, who rents a place on West 23rd Street after arriving in New York. Archer's choice to marry May privileges Knickerbocker convention over Ellen's new bohemianism. It's a safe and traditional choice that represents Archer's folly: hanging on to the quickly vanishing world of the Knickerbockers instead of following the tide of history as it changes course.

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Edith Wharton left the United States shortly after her divorce to live the rest of her life in France. After her departure, the “invaders” would give way to the new elites of New York's Jazz Age—a term coined by a young aspiring writer named Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, who moved to New York City from the Midwest in 1919.

Fitzgerald identifies the particular energy and charm of the city at that crucial moment as a consequence of the destruction of those tightly guarded walls that kept The Four Hundred from the bohemians, the Knickerbockers from the invaders, and—maybe most importantly—those with a sense of creativity and culture from those who actually had the money to support it.

In 1920, Fitzgerald published his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, a book whose success brought him to national attention as a writer and convinced an Alabama socialite named Zelda Sayre to be his wife. The novel's protagonist, Amory Blaine, is a Midwesterner who falls in love with a wealthy young debutante named Isabelle Borgé. The plot is based on Fitzgerald's own romance with Ginevra King, who was prohibited from marrying him by her status-obsessed family. Throughout his fiction, King would serve as a model for a certain kind of Fitzgerald character: a young woman who symbolized the unattainable desires of the American Dream. Too wealthy and beautiful for him to possess, King motivated him to write about his own desires for possession.

This Side of Paradise was seen by conservative critics and reviewers as a dangerous call to arms, inaugurating a class warfare that would dominate 1920s New York. And both Scott and Zelda became polarizing figures in that war. He from Minnesota, she from Alabama, the attractive young couple took 1920s Manhattan by storm.

At a climactic moment in Fitzgerald's most famous novel, *The Great Gatsby*, the characters engage a room at the Plaza Hotel—where a fantastic fight ensues between Tom Buchanan, a character based on Ginevra King's first husband, oil tycoon and polo player Bill Mitchell, and Jay Gatsby, the self-made man in love with Tom's wife, Daisy. As they drink, Buchanan interrogates Gatsby on his pedigree: "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out."

It's no accident that Buchanan chooses the Plaza as a site to confront Gatsby about his desires for Mrs. Buchanan and remind the entrepreneur of his own inherent superiority. The Plaza has long been associated with displays of wealth and social standing—but who was considered to have that standing was a constantly evolving proposition.

Truman Capote

In the 1960s, the Plaza would be the setting for a ball to rival Alva Vanderbilt's, but instead of a gilded-age social climber as its hostess, it would have a writer born to a teenage mother in New Orleans. In some ways, Alva Vanderbilt and Truman Capote have a lot in common. Both came to the city as relatively obscure Southerners eager to make themselves known and celebrated by the rich and fabulous. And both made their way by forming their own inner circle before branching out onto the larger scene. Capote's early literary successes with *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and the classic New York novel *Breakfast at Tiffany's* led to his embrace by a group of society wives he dubbed his swans.



Truman Capote

The Black and White Ball Capote held at the Plaza in November of 1966 was his attempt to continue the grand New York writerly tradition of bridging different groups of elites. As Fitzgerald had imagined the bohemians coming together with the Knickerbockers, Capote set out to create an event attended by the best of the best—artists, musicians, movie stars, politicians, writers, and royalty—regardless of their sphere of influence.

Capote had the audacity to publish the guest list in *The New York Times*, a document scrutinized both for who was on it and who was not. A central irony was that at the actual ball, Capote insisted attendees be masked, claiming that the masks were “so the doorman might dance with the duchess.”

After Capote's ball, the writer drifted deeper into alcoholism and depression. Trying to prove one's centrality to New York society while simultaneously roasting its power players is a tricky business that would come to burn Capote in the 1970s, when he published an expose of the lives of the elite who had accepted him and made his ball a success. His swans turned against him, and he spent the rest of his life largely alone.

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6

New York through the Eyes of Immigrants



You can't walk the streets of New York today without seeing ubiquitous evidence of the city's many vibrant cultures: from Chinatown to Little Italy, Washington Heights to Koreatown, and Richmond Hill to Rego Park. New York has continued to be a hub for arts and culture within the United States in no small part because it has always been a place where newcomers mix with long-time residents—and where one needn't go more than a few blocks to travel the world. In this lecture, you'll consider the literature of some of New York's immigrant communities. In exploring the work of writers like Abraham Cahan, Stephen Crane, Julia Alvarez, and Esmeralda Santiago, you'll learn how the city looked through the eyes of the newly arrived and how those same populations shaped the city into the culturally rich place it is today.



Abraham Cahan and *The Rise of David Levinsky*

Most of New York's Jewish immigrants would arrive in the city between 1881 and 1924, a period of sweeping antisemitic violence in Eastern Europe. These new Jewish Americans—mostly from an area of Russia known as the Pale of Settlement—came with little to no resources, spending everything they had on the treacherous overseas journey.

The experience of the Jews who came from Russia to settle in the tenement buildings of New York's Lower East Side was captured by Abraham Cahan in his semi-autobiographical 1917 novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*. Like Cahan himself, Levinsky arrives in New York in the 1880s. Ellis Island had yet to be built, so immigrants came through Castle Garden in Battery Park, the primary point of entry for new arrivals to the city at the time. The word *kesselgarten* entered the Yiddish language to mean any space that was noisy and poorly organized, reflecting Jewish immigrants' poor impressions of it.



The Lower East Side that David encounters is full of survivors of European persecution now struggling to get by in conditions of extreme poverty in the United States. David's first two lodgings are benches in the kitchens of

boardinghouses or private homes where he is allowed to lie down at night. Food is hard to come by, and the competition for gainful employment is fierce.

Like David Levinsky, many Russian Jews found themselves employed in New York's growing garment industry. In *The Rise of David Levinsky*, clothes make the man in more ways than one. The character realizes early on that an impressive outward appearance will yield professional success. But he is also quite literally made by the garment industry: He rises from a poorly paid sweatshop worker to become the wealthy owner of his own cloak factory.

The novel traces the protagonist's financial success and existential failure. At the end, Levinsky laments that while necessity threw him into that world, his longings for a career that provided creative expression and intellectual satisfaction remained unfulfilled.

The spiritual and philosophical aspects of Levinsky's successes and failures, as well as the clear and detailed prose style of the text, have led to this work being considered a document of American literary realism. Works of literary realism, which often focused on specific geographical locales and racial or ethnic subcultures, were designed to offer a slice of life—a sensory picture of people and places readers might not otherwise encounter.

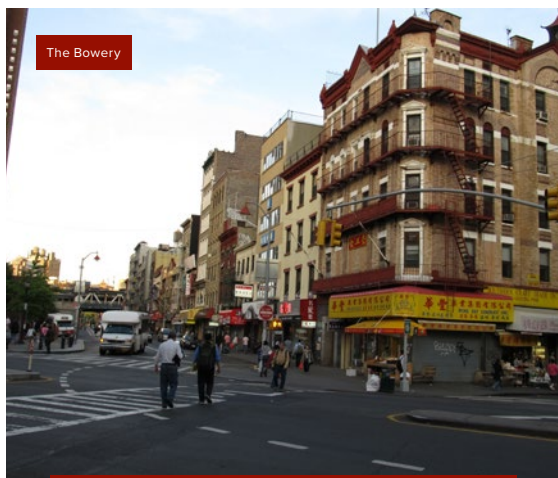
Stephen Crane and the Bowery

Stephen Crane's 1893 *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is a gritty naturalist rendering of the life of a shirt factory worker named Maggie Johnson, whose family's struggles with poverty and alcoholism in New York's Irish immigrant community lead her to sex work and, eventually, death.

One of the most distinctive features of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is Crane's realistic use of dialect, which allows him not only to capture how the streets of the Bowery sounded but also to emphasize the role of Mary—Maggie's mother—within the novel.

Tulane University Professor Donald Pizer has written that Mary Johnson symbolizes the entire world of the Bowery, corrupting the pure and innocent Maggie with her own vices and illusions. Crane describes Maggie as a flower

that “blossomed in a mud puddle,” and her lines of dialogue are less heavily laden with the Irish Bowery dialect that marks the lines of Mary. If Maggie blossomed in the mud puddle that is understood to be the Bowery, Mary is both a part of that puddle and a representation of it. The Bowery’s role in scripting Maggie’s tragic end makes a not-so-subtle argument that the cycle of poverty among the residents of this district cannot be broken without political reform.



Crane was a friend of Jacob Riis, the Danish American journalist whose photographs and descriptions of tenement dwellers were published under the title *How the Other Half Lives*. The book stoked upper- and middle-class interest in the plight of New York’s poorest citizens: those who had most recently arrived on its shores. Riis claimed that the tenement housing system was a failure and that the alcoholism and high crime rates in the Bowery and on the Lower East Side could be attributed to inhumane housing arrangements. His work inspired housing law reforms both in Manhattan and on a national scale—but immigrants still faced the daunting prospect of assimilating to American ways of living and working.

Julia Alvarez

By the mid-20th century, new arrivals would create communities further uptown and in the outer boroughs, in areas like Washington Heights, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. The Washington Heights neighborhood was home

to Jewish, Irish, Greek, Puerto Rican, and Cuban communities throughout the 20th century, but by the 1970s, it had become the largest Dominican neighborhood in the United States.

Many arrivals to New York from the Americas faced more enduring racialized discrimination than their earlier European counterparts, which the Dominican American writer Julia Alvarez chronicles in her 1991 novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*. This work follows the lives of a group of Dominican sisters who arrive in New York with their parents in the 1960s.

Hoping to provide them with a better education, their parents place the girls in a majority-White Catholic school. Despite the strangeness and antagonism of their classmates, they find themselves assimilating to American culture but still identify as “un dominican-york,” a people who live between and within two different cultures.

Alvarez’s work takes up language as a central theme. The people who came to New York from other nations did not come as empty vessels—they brought their own languages and cultures with them, which in turn became the culture of the places where they lived.

If these neighborhoods had an official language, it would likely be Spanglish, the blending of Spanish and English that the García girls learn to embrace. Yolanda, the sister whose experiences most closely mirror those of Alvarez’s own life, begins to write “secret poems in her new language,” blending the Spanish of her birth—which marks her as an outsider—with the English of her education, which fosters her desire to become a writer. By combining the two, she asserts a unique identity she can embrace as her own.

The incorporation of Spanish words into English prose literalizes the blending of cultures experienced in neighborhoods like the Heights, but it also performs a kind of linguistic looking back. *The García Girls* is written in reverse chronological order because, as Alvarez has said, she wanted her readers to feel how the immigrant experience is always marked by looking back. The incorporation of Spanish words also works to this end because it brings the language of the writer’s past into the linguistic present.

Esmeralda Santiago and Bildungsroman

Other Antilles-born New York writers have expressed different feelings about living within and between two languages. The Puerto Rican New York writer Esmeralda Santiago wrote her 1993 memoir *When I Was Puerto Rican* first in English, then in Spanish.

Santiago's memoir is the story of a journey to individual success. Beginning with her childhood in Puerto Rico, the memoir tracks her family's move to Brooklyn in the 1960s and her growth as an artist living in the United States. Though Santiago's arrival in New York takes place almost a century after David Levinsky's, her initial impressions of the city are not dissimilar. She writes, "I didn't expect the streets of New York to be paved with gold, but I did expect them to be bright and cheerful, clean, lively. Instead, they were dark and forbidding, empty, hard." But some aspects of the city provide the comforts of home—thanks to those who came before her.



When I Was Puerto Rican closes with the revelation that, after graduating from the High School of the Performing Arts in 1966, Santiago has become a scholarship student at Harvard University in Massachusetts. She visits her former high school on the Upper West Side and imagines that someday her name will be added to the list of famous alumni, a marker of her extraordinary success.

Literature scholars use the German term *bildungsroman*, which literally means novel of development, to refer to works that track a character's growth—typically from childhood or young adulthood to some significant marker of adulthood like career success or marriage. Emeritus Stanford University Professor Franco Moretti argues that the *bildungsroman* is a product of the Enlightenment, a time when people began to believe in the power of education and individual progress.

Assimilation to American culture in the works of Cahan, Alvarez, Santiago, and other immigrant writers of New York is not presented as an unalloyed good. These characters have reservations about who they become within their new US context, whether they fail or succeed at creating new lives for themselves. Furthermore, their stories not only point to the changes they observe in themselves but also reveal how each subsequent wave of arrivals changes the city itself. In the end, though these stories may be examples of the *bildungsroman*, the world-building they engage in is collective as well as individual. Through the personal stories of the characters in these fictions, readers come to learn about how the international urban space of the city was shaped.

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7

New York's Countercultures



From 1900 to 1970, more than 6 million Black people had left the American South to find work in the factories of the North. As you will see in this lecture, faced with limited options for places to live and work, New York's Black population would find themselves crowded into small neighborhoods such as Harlem and forced to accept higher rents and lower wages. This discrimination created an enormous amount of human suffering, but it was also responsible for new developments in American culture that would shape the way people think, read, listen, dance, and dream.



Claude McKay

Until 1900, Harlem had mostly been home to White people. At that time, Black New Yorkers predominantly lived in the tenements of the Upper West Side, where they had moved after White immigrant groups pushed them out of the West Village.

By 1914, the area was quickly gaining a reputation as a place where Black artists and intellectuals could find community. When a 24-year-old poet named Claude McKay arrived in town that year, he was, in a sense, participating in two migrations.

Originally from Jamaica, McKay was a part of the Caribbean diaspora. Between 1888 and 1920, 146,000 Black and Brown islanders would leave the Caribbean for the United States, seeking refuge from colonial racism. But McKay was also joining the African American descendants of the formerly enslaved in their South-to-North journey across the United States.

When he arrived in Harlem, McKay was already an established writer. Some of his earlier work included lines he wrote while working his day job as a constable in Kingston, hence the title of his second collection, *Constab Ballads*. This book—along with his first, *Songs of Jamaica*, both of them published in 1912—utilized the sonnet form, which was popularized by English writers like William Shakespeare and John Donne.



McKay's early sonnets follow this classical form but utilize the Creole spoken language of the Jamaican people, not Shakespeare's English. The clashing histories of the form of the colonizer and the language of the colonized create a tension in the sonnets that enhances the tension of their thematic content.

Once in Harlem, McKay continued to relieve his feelings through sonnets, but he would abandon the dialect of his earlier work. Instead, Jamaica would enter his poetry through images that blend the immigrant's longing for home and the African American's fight for equality.

His first book published in the United States was also one of the first works scholars consider to have been a part of the Harlem Renaissance. *Harlem Shadows* from 1922 was a great commercial success as well as a call to arms that honestly portrayed many sides of the Black experience in America coming together in Harlem. Addressing controversial themes like sex work, McKay's poems paint even the most tragic figures in Harlem with depth and dignity. In the sonnet "The Harlem Dancer," McKay writes of a performer in a jazz club and is able to convey the beauty of her art and the pain of her longing for a different kind of life.

This poem, which emerged so early in the Harlem Renaissance, underscores an irony that would become a dominant theme in much of the writing of and commentary about the period. The segregation of New York's Black population to Harlem created a community wherein the arts were able to flourish. But almost even before this movement was off the ground, White New Yorkers sought to benefit from and exploit it.

Integrated Harlem

Mixed-race writers like Nella Larsen and James Weldon Johnson were interested in exploring the experience of Harlem life from both sides of the color line. The title character in Johnson's 1912 *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* is a pianist who wows White audiences with his original ragtime compositions and reworkings of classical music. The novel includes descriptions of the raucous scenes at Harlem's earliest integrated jazz clubs, with particular attention to how White spectators would consume Black art and artists.

The sexualization of Black bodies emerges in both Johnson's and Larsen's writing, but Larsen also uses the scene of the early 20th-century jazz club to consider the fiction of race itself, noting the variety of colors presented by its patrons and marveling that they could all be united under the same banner of oppression.

The clubs described in these novels came to be known as black and tan clubs, places where White, Black, and mixed-race folks could socialize in a tolerant environment that was also permissive of alternative sexualities, new dance forms, and music that many at the time deemed licentious and immoral.

One of the most sought-after performers at the black and tans was Josephine Baker, who would draw on imagery from more tropical climes, catering to White audiences' tastes for what they saw as exotic and Black immigrant audiences' nostalgic memories of home.

Today, scholars are increasingly recognizing that the arts and culture of the Harlem Renaissance were just as influential in launching a queer arts movement as they were in launching a Black arts movement. Many of the Renaissance's foremost writers and artists were themselves gay or bisexual, including Baker and McKay. The fact that so many of the movement's authors and key figures were queer may have contributed to a queering of the culture of Harlem more broadly.

Queer Harlem and the Counterculture

Another queer movement was quite literally being born in Harlem when Caribbean immigrants Byron and Linda Lorde welcomed a daughter, Audre, in 1934. Born legally blind and unusually sensitive to spoken language, Audre gravitated toward poetry at an early age.

Throughout the 1960s, Lorde regularly published her poems in high-profile venues. Her 1982 work *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* inaugurated a new genre combining history, biography, and myth that she called biomythography.

Zami details Lorde's life growing up in Harlem and coming into her identity as, in her own words, a "black, lesbian, feminist, socialist, mother, warrior, poet." It also paints a vibrant picture of the lesbian bar scene in 1950s Greenwich Village. According to Lorde, a particular haunt—The Bagatelle at 86 University Place—was "the most popular gay-girl's bar in the Village." The scene at The Bag, as it was known in the community, was rough.

For the first part of the 1960s, countercultural poets had been gathering for readings at Café Le Metro on Second Avenue. New York Beat poets like Allen Ginsberg, Diane di Prima, and Gregory Corso regularly read and hung out there.

But constant police raids and fines from the city forced its closure in 1965. Without a place to call home, the poets founded The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, which would become the locus of the new and experimental poetry scene in New York for the next 5 decades.

The list of poets who gave readings at The Poetry Project in the 1970s and 1980s is like a who's who of countercultural poetry in America. But this unique institution that grew in an East Village church also forged bridges to poetry's past. One of the most memorable events from this period had to be a joint reading by the Jewish American Beat poet Allen Ginsburg and the old-guard Boston poet Robert Lowell—long stream-of-consciousness verses that offered mediations on the chaos and violence of the modern world.



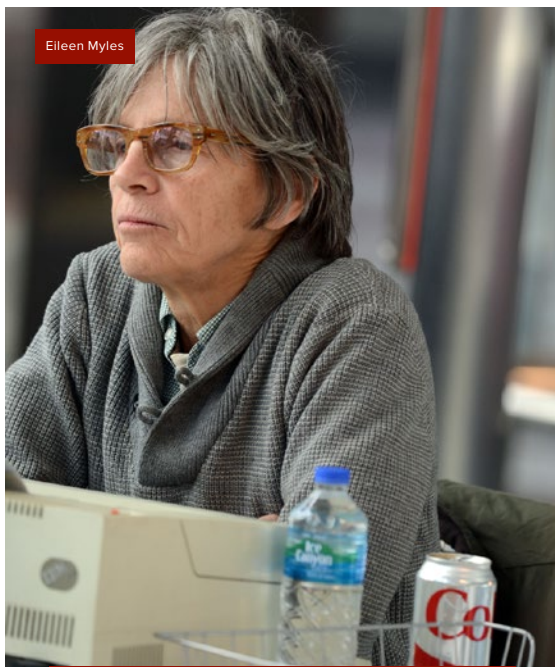
Eileen Myles and the HIV Crisis

By 1984, The Poetry Project had found a new director in the lesbian poet Eileen Myles (who uses they/them pronouns). Myles had moved from Boston to Greenwich Village in the 1970s with the goal of becoming a poet. Their directorship of The Poetry Project set the stage for a career that continued in the tradition of Audre Lorde, opening up the hidden worlds of a Lower East Side subculture to an entire nation of eager readers.

Myles is now perhaps best known for their autobiographical work of fiction *Chelsea Girls*, which describes their life as a young, struggling poet in the 1980s. They recount living in the East Village on \$250 a month, depending on friends for drinks, drugs, and cigarettes but too ashamed to ask for what they really needed: food. To make ends meet, Myles waited tables at a jazz and poetry club in the Bowery called the Tin Palace. They also had jobs as a bike messenger and a clerk at Bleecker Bob's, the record store in Greenwich Village.

By the middle of the 1980s, these earlier scenes of joyful creativity and youthful hand-to-mouth living had given way to tragedy. The community built by Lorde, Ginsburg, Myles, and others was now inundated by the HIV crisis and the governmental failure to address it.

This crisis in the community caused many poets, writers, and artists to question what their work had



accomplished—not only their art and writings but also the activism associated with the race movement in Harlem and the queer movement in the Lower East Side.

Both movements found their origins in the creation of communities that, for a time, were able to use literature to create solidarity and dream of new futures where joy and love seemed possible. But both were also burned by an outside world that failed to aid them in times of need and a city that largely feared, rather than fostered, the new ideas and great beauty their work brought to the world beyond their insular neighborhoods.

The enduring questions about the political success or failure of the Black and queer rights movements have long kept scholars debating. However, it's difficult to argue with the indelible ways the works produced within these communities influenced and inspired future writers. Such contradictions are at the heart of their power.

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8

Appalachia and the Mid-Atlantic: Ghosts and Labor

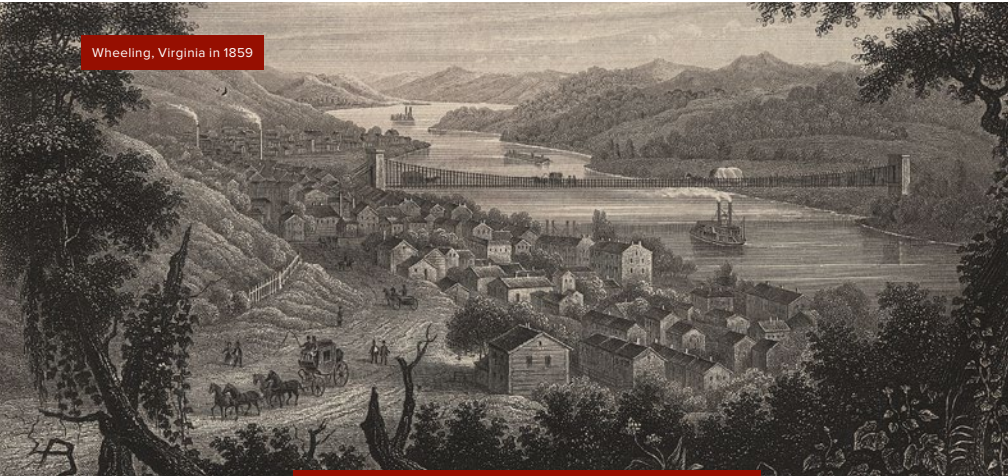


In this lecture, you'll travel to the mid-Atlantic region of the United States, beginning with one of Appalachia's earliest chroniclers in fiction: Rebecca Harding Davis—a regionalist writer whose impact is far greater than her fame. Then, you'll explore how, in creating the literature of Appalachia, its citizens have taken the opportunity to tell their own stories and transform the cultural imaginary of this place from one of exploitation to one of creative expression, pride, and appreciation.



Rebecca Harding Davis and Literary Naturalism

Rebecca Harding Davis was born in Pennsylvania in 1831, and by 1836, her family had settled in a town called Wheeling in West Virginia. Her arrival on the national literary scene as a powerful and popular new writer coincided with the start of the Civil War, a conflict that divided her hometown. Wheeling sits on the Ohio River, the famous border between free and slave states. Davis's own family had sympathizers on both sides of the conflict.



Wheeling, Virginia in 1859

Davis herself believed that every person had a right to be free, and the more than 500 essays, articles, short stories, and novels she wrote address many social issues, ranging from mental health care reform to Native American workers' rights. They also include screeds against the new consumerism she saw as a threat to both family life and the creative process.

Davis's big break came in 1861 when she sent a haunting story to the editors at *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine in Boston. This story, "Life in the Iron Mills," was a first on many accounts. It was Davis's first nationally published piece, the *Atlantic Monthly's* first work of fiction about Appalachia, and, according to some scholars, the first work of literary naturalism.

Writers invested in literary naturalism considered human beings animals and were interested in them as flesh-and-blood creatures. Their descriptions often focus on the bodily to the point of the grotesque, and they typically subscribe to a survival-of-the-fittest logic that views life as a competition for resources and power. They also traffic in sad endings.

Davis's protagonist is Hugh Wolfe, a tubercular iron worker with the soul of an artist. Wolfe is a furnace tender in the mill, a grueling job Davis would have seen performed firsthand. The life expectancy of such workers was not long. While other writers of naturalist fiction that addressed social causes tended to rely on dehumanizing descriptions of their subjects—meant to evoke horror and pity in readers—Davis chose to depict her iron worker as a talented artist who sculpts figures out of korr, an industrial waste particulate that is the byproduct of the iron refining process.

When Hugh decides to keep a wallet that his cousin stole from a wealthy visitor to the mill, he's sentenced to 19 years of hard labor in prison. Rather than lose his freedom, he takes his own life in his jail cell with the same sharp piece of iron he'd used to carve his art.

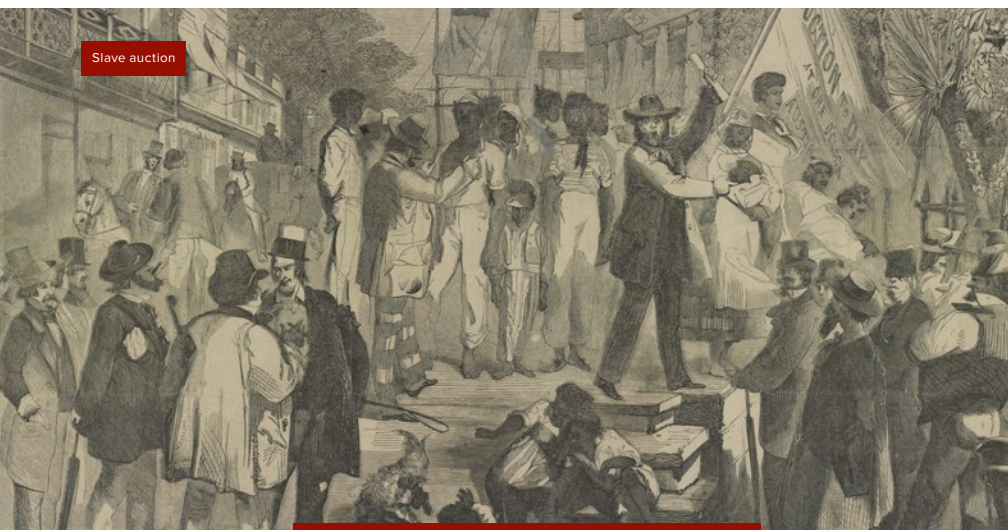
The American Gothic

"Life in the Iron Mills" is far more haunting than uplifting, and the other genre to which it is often attached is the gothic—that set of literary tropes and conventions people associate with haunted mansions, secret passageways, spectral figures, and anything making mysterious noises in the night.

Gothic stories are fundamentally haunted by history: ghosts of past violence crying out to be acknowledged. This violence most frequently occurs in the realm of institutional power and oppression, so the gothic in literature can serve as a record of the darkest truths of particular social systems throughout history.

The American gothic comes out of the most gruesome period of exploitative labor practices, from the kinds of dismal worksites Davis writes about to the far more devastating realities of African American enslavement. Therefore, the gothic has a lot to tell people about racialized fears and desires—as well as the

anxieties and instabilities at the root of American capitalism, which itself was forged in the same furnace as the slaver's chains. The gothic as form speaks the unspeakable and conjures the parts of history that people would most like to forget.



Frederick Douglass

Another famous Baltimore writer, Frederick Douglass, would populate his writings with the real horrors of labor—and enslavement—that he witnessed firsthand. Douglass was born on a plantation in Talbot County, Maryland, and his childhood was marked by the unimaginable hardships of enslavement. The narrative of his life that he published in 1845, one of American literature's most astounding and best written works, details a catalogue of horrors he witnessed as a child.

According to the Vanderbilt University professor and literary critic Teresa Goddu, Douglass's narrative "rewrites the traditional trajectory of the American autobiography in Gothic terms when he describes slavery as a hell peopled by monstrous masters and as a nightmare from which he cannot awake."

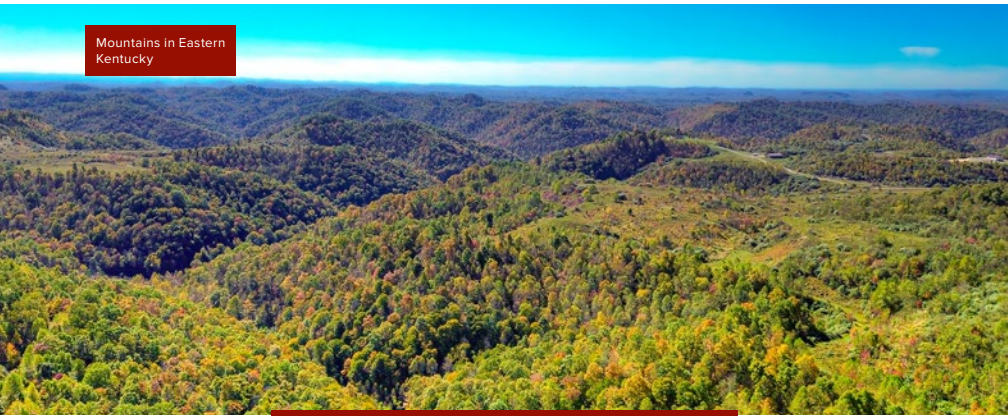
Circumstances began to improve for Douglass when he was chosen, seemingly at random, to live with his master's son-in-law in Baltimore. During his enslavement in Baltimore, Douglass worked as a skilled ship's caulker at Gardner's Shipyard. This time spent working on the wharves alongside free Black men motivated him to seek his own liberation. He escaped enslavement by using a freedman's papers and catching the train to Philadelphia.

In the 1860s and 1870s, Douglass traveled throughout Appalachia on speaking and research trips, which included several Emancipation Day addresses. This suggests that Douglass was intentionally reaching out to the pockets of African American communities throughout the mostly White region.

Annette Saunooke Clapsaddle and the Forgotten Appalachians

The question of the Appalachian mountains and who has a right to their use and enjoyment has long animated the fiction of the region. Annette Saunooke Clapsaddle's 2020 book *Even as We Breathe* is the first novel published by a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, one of three federally recognized Cherokee tribes. Their presence in this region, among the Blue Ridge Mountains, goes back 12,000 years.

Mountains in Eastern
Kentucky



Set during World War II, Clapsaddle's novel centers on 19-year-old Cowney Sequoyah, who takes a summer job at the Grove Park Inn and Resort in Asheville. Cowney is from Cherokee, North Carolina, which is 50 miles west of Asheville, the big city. It sits just inside the Qualla Boundary, a parcel of land owned by the Eastern Band since the 1870s. Today, it is home to the Museum of the Cherokee People—where visitors can learn the story of the Cherokee from the area's earliest inhabitants.

The Grove Park Inn, where Clapsaddle's novel is set, was built in 1913 by Edwin Wiley Grove, a pharmaceutical entrepreneur who sought to capitalize on new interest in Asheville as a resort community after the Vanderbilt family decided to build their own summer house there. It is still around—as a resort where guests can stay—and day visitors can pop in to tour the lobby or enjoy a glass of wine on the terrace while watching the sun set over the mountains. However, in the 1940s, when Clapsaddle's novel is set, the inn was used by the State Department's Special Division as a detention site for diplomats and consular staff from Axis countries and their families.

Over the course of the novel, Clapsaddle's protagonist and narrator must grapple with the terrible treatment he receives from the White staff on account of his being Native while he watches their wartime enemies be treated like privileged guests. He concludes that both the guests and the White staff would rather forget about the Cherokee and their claims to the place, and he moves about like a ghost on the property.

Being forgotten is a major theme in much of contemporary Appalachian fiction. Characters in these stories report feeling used and discarded by the rest of the country, as the region has offered a near constant supply of both labor and nonhuman resources like coal and lumber for centuries.

Discrimination and Literary Transformation

Barbara Kingsolver's 2022 novel *Demon Copperhead*—winner of the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for fiction—treats an epidemic plaguing this and many other regions in modern times: opioid addiction.

The book's protagonist is put into foster care when his mother overdoses. He must learn to survive the vicissitudes of the child welfare system and then battle his own opioid addiction after a high school football injury. Based on the Charles Dickens novel *David Copperfield*, Kingsolver's work likewise charts the path of a young man disenfranchised by economic and regional inequity.

Demon is Melungeon, a racial categorization found only in Appalachia. No one is quite sure how the Melungeons came to live in the region, but one theory is that they are the mixed-race descendants of the Cherokees and African and Portuguese sailors. Today, Melungeons can mostly be identified through their family names. Kingsolver made Demon Melungeon to bring attention to this little-known group that has faced their own fair share of social, if not legal, discrimination in the region where she grew up.

This was also the experience of Silas House, Kentucky's most recent—and first openly gay—poet laureate. An editor at the University Press of Kentucky, House worked with Clapsaddle on *Even as We Breathe*, and the poetry he has written has helped readers all over of the country to understand the struggles and joys peculiar to Appalachian life.

In his poems, he carries on the tradition of writers like Davis and Kingsolver, who write over and over again about the power of literature to transform lives—and how literature has shifted their understanding of the region from a place mined by outsiders to a home that can inform their own creative work. House's poem "Double Creek Girl" describes the young Appalachian girls objectified in photographs and caricatures of the region who find their own voices through reading and writing.

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9

Romance and Scandal in Virginia and DC



“Virginia is for lovers” is one of the most successful advertising slogans of all time. The campaign was introduced in 1969, a year when love was everywhere. The Virginia tourism industry might have tapped into something even bigger than the spirit of 1969, though, given that Virginia and the Washington DC metropolitan area have long served as a setting for some of literature’s most captivating love stories. In this lecture, you’ll learn about the past and present of the romance genre while you visit Virginia and the US capital to find out what local sites and scenes have made the country’s authors and their characters swoon on the page.



Romance in Richmond

As a genre of fiction, romance trades in love stories with happy endings.

Romance novels have a long and vaunted history in American literature, and many were written or set in Virginia. It was a particularly popular location for novels known as Reconstruction



romances, a subgenre that emerged after the Civil War. In the Reconstruction period, Americans were concerned that no amount of political reconciliation could heal the broken nation. Love stories that featured one party from each side of the country—typically a Southern bride and a Northern groom—worked to address that anxiety in at least two different ways.

First, the characters acted as metaphors for the qualities of the region. The Northern man in a Reconstruction romance novel is often a shrewd businessman or otherwise engaged in some kind of mechanized industry, whereas the Southern belle he'll eventually marry prefers a slower-paced, agrarian lifestyle. By meeting in the middle, they arrive at an ideal. Second, many families were divided by the war, especially in border regions, and Reconstruction romances narrated the hope that love would triumph and bring the country back together in the end.

Ellen Glasgow was one of the most successful of these novelists. Born in Richmond in 1873, Glasgow was only around for the tail end of Reconstruction and missed the war itself. But the first three novels she would write in the 20th century tell the history of Virginia from the beginning of the Civil War right up until her own time.

Glasgow's 1904 novel *The Deliverance: A Romance of the Virginia Tobacco Fields* tells the story of Christopher Blake, the son of a Southern gentleman tobacco farmer. After the war, his family's reduced financial circumstances require him to perform the farm labor himself. The work hardens him, and he nurtures a grudge against Mr. Fletcher, the past manager of the estate who takes it over when Blake's father can no longer afford to keep it. His hatred for the Fletchers is eventually softened by his love for Fletcher's granddaughter, Maria.

Richmond is also the scene of Edgar Allan Poe's childhood, and it is where he met his first fiancée, his neighbor Sarah Elmira Royster Shelton. The two fell in love as teenagers, but her father disapproved of the match, and the pair split when Poe left to study at the University of Virginia. He wrote at least two poems that are explicitly about Elmira, and many scholars believe that one of his most famous works—the poem “Annabel Lee”—was inspired by her as well.



Over 20 years after Poe and Elmira went their separate ways, they would meet again in Richmond, where Poe was giving a lecture. The two rekindled their romance and planned to finally marry, but Poe would die in Baltimore later that year before they got the chance. Elmira died in 1888, and her obituary

on the front page of the *Richmond Whig* identified her as “Poe’s First and Last Love.” For all these reasons, Richmond is rich in Poe fandom and home to The Poe Museum.

Mrs. Southworth

Washington DC’s Georgetown neighborhood is home to the peaceful Oak Hill Cemetery. If a visitor were to enter the cemetery via the gate near Montrose Park, they’d find an unimposing headstone that looks sadly untended. They’d never know it marked the life of one of the most commercially successful figures in American letters—but that’s largely because Mrs. Southworth, as she was often called, became famous writing romance, which is a genre the American literary establishment has typically overlooked.

In her own time, Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte Southworth was more famous than Melville, Hawthorne, Thoreau, or any other 19th-century writer who appears on university syllabuses or gets assigned in grade school. Her best-selling novels were serialized in the day’s most popular magazines and newspapers. Plays put on across the country were based on her plots, and parents named their daughters Capitola, after the heroine of her most popular novel, *The Hidden Hand*. The character’s name itself is an homage to Washington—the nation’s capital—and the site of Southworth’s extraordinary rise to fame.

Many of Southworth’s novels would weave abolition of slavery into their love stories, but more often they pushed the cause of equal rights for women. Her stock-in-trade was creating love stories her readers couldn’t put down, but it’s important to recognize how highly unconventional her heroes and heroines were for their time, setting a precedent for tropes in the romance genre.

The protagonist of Southworth’s 1868 novel *Fair Play*, Britomarte Conyers, declares that she will not marry the man who pursues her until marriage laws have been changed to enfranchise women. Even when stuck on a deserted island with him after a shipwreck, she continues to turn him away and lecture him on sexism.

Eventually, Southworth would become very rich. Still, she chose to live in a modest cottage on the edge of the Potomac in Georgetown. The cottage was razed in 1942, and photos of it remind one of just how much the city has changed. At the time, the cottage resembled a country house in rural surroundings. Now, Georgetown is a bustling part of the city.

Edward Christopher Williams

Another DC writer who deserves far more recognition is best known for his single romance novel: *The Letters of Davy Carr*. Reprinted for the first time in 2005 under the title *When Washington Was in Vogue*, *The Letters of Davy Carr* was originally published anonymously in 1922 in one of DC's first African American papers, *The Messenger*.

The author of the novel, Edward Christopher Williams, was America's first professionally trained African American librarian. He became a member of American literary royalty when he married Ethel Chesnutt—daughter of the famed North Carolina author Charles Chesnutt, who is best known for his 1901 novel *The Marrow of Tradition*, about the White supremacist Wilmington massacre of 1898.

When Washington Was in Vogue is set in a similar milieu to Williams's father-in-law's tale of the African American community that thrived in Wilmington prior to the massacre. In the 1920s, Washington was home to an insular group of African Americans who considered themselves to be the nation's Black aristocracy.

The protagonist of Williams's novel—World War I veteran Captain Davy Carr—stumbles into this scene of endless dinner parties, formal dances, and social betrayal when he arrives in town to research a book on the slave trade. He rents a room in the home of the wealthy Rhodes family and quickly finds his way into their social circle, falling in love with their daughter Caroline.

The novel has been connected to the Harlem Renaissance on account of its period and subject matter, but Captain Carr is not the typical protagonist of a Harlem Renaissance novel. He doesn't embrace the jazz age but criticizes it, including Caroline's own flapperish tendencies.

Caroline is also a far cry from the typical, light-skinned tragic Renaissance heroine. She is dark and unbothered by her color. While she leads a flapper's lifestyle, her wild ways are balanced by her wit and knowledge, evident in the banter between the two lovers.

In a way, the story is an update on the Reconstruction romance. But instead of facing a North/South divide, these lovers bridge the gulf between two generations of African Americans at a time when African American culture was rapidly shifting, especially among elites like those featured in Williams's novel.

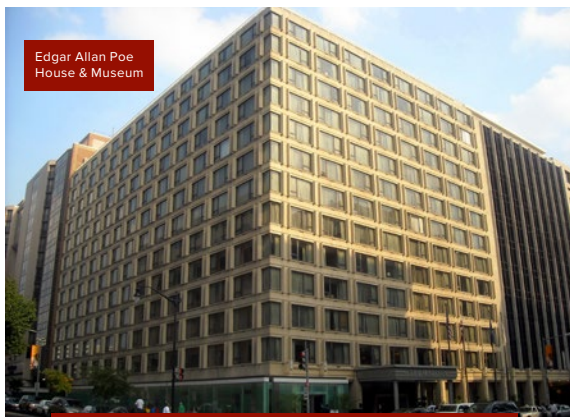
Political Intrigue in DC Literature

One of the hottest literary political hangouts is now a legend of the past: the Montpelier Room at the Madison Hotel in DC, where Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein—*The*

Washington Post journalists who broke the Watergate scandal—liked to dine. It's featured in Woodward and Bernstein's 1974 book about the scandal, *All the President's Men*.

Watergate wasn't the only scandal *The Washington Post* writer Carl Bernstein was involved in. In

1979, he cheated on his wife with Margaret Jay, a Labour Party politician. Unfortunately for him, his wife was Nora Ephron, the Jewish American writer famous today for her romantic comedy films *When Harry Met Sally* and *Sleepless in Seattle*.



Ephron was no stranger to DC, and her low opinion of the capital's male power players was confirmed when Bernstein cheated on her when she was 7 months pregnant with his child. Nora got her revenge in the form of a novel, the 1983 *Heartburn*, which is almost entirely based on Bernstein's affair with Jay and the dissolution of his marriage to Ephron.

Bernstein appears in the novel as syndicated columnist Mark Feldman, a choice of name that evoked even more scandal. At the time, Ephron was one of the few people who was aware of the real identity of Deep Throat, the notorious Watergate scandal informant. That man was named Mark Felt, a fact only revealed to the public when Felt came forward in 2005. But back in 1983, Ephron revealed Bernstein's betrayal and, more subtly, this national secret in one fell literary swoop. In addition to the dishy details of the Bernstein-Ephron divorce with a side helping of political intrigue, *Heartburn* serves a glimpse into the lives of the 1980s Washington media scene.

Meet You in the Middle, a 2021 romance novel by Devon Daniels, also trades in political intrigue. The conflict in this story isn't North/South, old/new, or Washington/New York—but Democrat/Republican. Daniels's heroine, Kate Adams, works for a Democratic senator, and her love interest, Ben Mackenzie, works for a Republican one.

The novel is set after the election of a reactionary new Republican president, who's clearly based on Donald Trump. Kate and Ben have the usual beginning-of-courtship spats over politics but eventually come to understand one another in yet another romantic metaphor for the nation's divides. Works like *Meet You in the Middle* demonstrate that the Reconstruction romance is still alive and well, though it may have migrated contexts.

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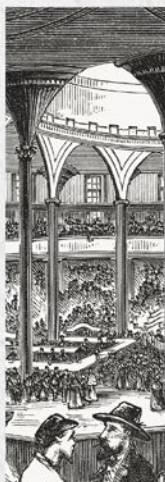
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10

Southern Gothic in Mississippi and Georgia



The next stop on your literary tour of the American South is a place in Mississippi that doesn't actually exist—Yoknapatawpha County, the fictional setting of the majority of the novels of William Faulkner, one of the North American South's most storied writers. From there, you'll explore the works of Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, who—together with Faulkner—form the core of the canon that literary critics have come to refer to as Southern gothic fiction. Your last stop is Jesmyn Ward's fictional Bois Sauvage, where survival of and escape from slavery are the key themes. Through this journey, you'll examine how the hidden or unspeakable histories conjured by the Southern gothic are mostly ghosts of the history of enslavement in the Southern United States.



William Faulkner

William Faulkner was the son of Murry and Maud Falkner—he added the *u* as he was headed off to join the British Royal Air Force in Canada in 1918 to make himself sound more British. While in the Royal Air Force, Faulkner never saw combat, but he nevertheless returned to regale the neighbors in his hometown of Oxford with a fake war injury and grand tales of battle, which he then turned into actual fiction in the form of five published short stories and a novel.

Faulkner would go on to write 17 novels and more than 40 short stories that would take the details of life in Lafayette County—the real part of Mississippi where he lived—and weave them into the Yoknapatawpha of his imagination.

Lafayette was a land that would define him and from which he could not separate himself or his work. His stories and novels feature a rich set of recurring characters and places, adding to the realism of the world he created—a world that was not quite his own but also not too distinct from it.

In 1930, a newly married Faulkner purchased a long uninhabited Greek Revival mansion in Oxford, Mississippi, which he christened Rowan Oak. He lived there with his wife, Estelle, and sometimes their three children, until his death in 1962. The house is now open as a museum.

The now beloved writer was none too popular around his hometown during his life. He had a reputation for drinking harder than he ever seemed to work. Locals took to calling him “Count No’Count” and, for the most part, kept their distance from the man and were little interested in the writer. It’s quite a reversal to today’s Oxford, which prides itself on its most famous former citizen.

The first of Faulkner’s novels that critics consider to be a masterpiece, *The Sound and the Fury*, proceeds through four distinct narrators: three members of the Compson family who would go on to appear in other Faulkner works and a fourth omniscient narrator who is unidentified as a character. Faulkner based the Compson family and their house on the Chandler family, who lived on Johnson Avenue in Oxford, just south of the main square.

The Old Chandler House still stands in Oxford today. It's bigger and fancier than Rowan Oak, and Faulkner uses the house in the novel to model the decay of the family—once planter aristocrats, they've fallen in status and fortune. By the time the narrator describes the place in the novel's last section, it's simply a “square, paintless house with its rotting portico.” In 1943, Faulkner wrote a letter of encouragement to a young writer back home in Mississippi named Eudora Welty. Six years later, the two would meet in Oxford and become friends.



The Southern Gothic and Eudora Welty

Ruin and decay, like the paintless and rotting Compson family home, are persistent themes in Southern gothic fiction. This deterioration reflects the social and financial consequences of the period following the Civil War—Reconstruction—and the further decline of the Southern states that came with the Great Depression.

By the time Eudora Welty published her short story collection *A Curtain of Green* in 1941, the term *Southern gothic* had come to describe most contemporary literature from this region. This first collection from Welty

includes some of her most beloved stories, for example, “The Petrified Man” and “Why I Live at the P. O.” These stories have an otherworldly quality to them. However, like Faulkner, Welty based much of her writing on the real lives and struggles of her friends, family, and neighbors in Jackson, Mississippi.

“The Petrified Man” takes place at a beauty salon, where women chat idly about subjects ranging from what they’ve seen at a carnival freak show to an unwanted pregnancy. “Why I Live at the P. O.” is another lively, dialogue-driven story about a family fight that results in the narrator’s decision to move out of her family home and into the post office where she is postmistress.

Jackson, Mississippi



While Welty earned her fame from her writing, she was also a talented photographer who was hired by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s to capture New Deal America in the South. The pictures Welty took around Mississippi during this period offer intimate glimpses of the same strange and dark beauty of the place as her stories do.

The paradox here is that Welty understood herself to be writing realism, while her fans and critics from other parts of the country understood her to be working in the intentionally surreal Southern gothic mode.

Welty's truths about her region were sometimes hard for readers—and even the writer herself—to take. In 1963, the author found herself, like many Americans, struggling to cope with the death of Medgar Evers, an American civil rights activist who was assassinated in the driveway of his Jackson home. After being shot, Evers was taken to a hospital in Jackson that initially refused to admit him because he was Black. He died 50 minutes later, at the age of 37. While the police were still investigating this heinous crime and the city of Jackson was still reeling in its aftermath, Welty wrote a short story called “Where Is the Voice Coming From?”

The story is a first-person narration of what she imagined such a killer might be thinking on the way to the murder. Welty's guess about what might drive a Ku Klux Klan member to gun a man down in his own driveway was so accurate that, just before the story was published in *The New Yorker* that year, editors scrambled to change some of its details to avoid a lawsuit once more details of the actual crime had been revealed. Medgar Evers's name was changed to Roland Summers, and the town of Jackson was fictionalized as Thermopylae, following in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha tradition.

Flannery O'Connor

Flannery O'Connor looms large among Mississippi writers as a consummate master. Though she wrote two novels—*Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*—she is primarily known for her short stories, which are often about violence and the unthinkable strange.

One of O'Connor's best and most famous works is the 1955 short story “Good Country People,” which first appeared in her collection *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. The story's protagonist is a young woman named Joy who has returned to her Georgia home after earning a PhD in philosophy. She changes her name to Hulga to irritate her mother, with whom she constantly quarrels. By the end of the story, an itinerant bible salesman has seduced Hulga to steal her prosthetic leg.

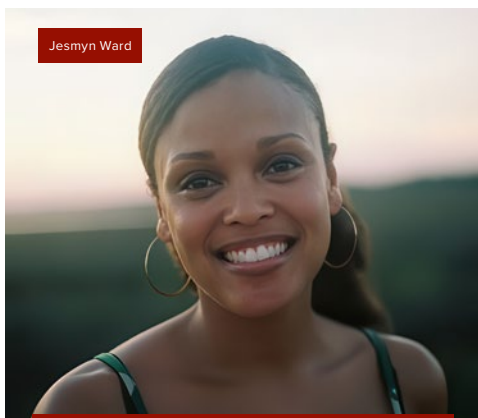
The character of Joy bears some resemblance to O'Connor herself. The author did not use a prosthetic leg, but she did suffer from lupus, which made it difficult to walk. More significantly, both Joy and Flannery are at odds with the anti-intellectualism of their families and their broader small-town communities.

Critics have pointed out that Joy as Hulga stands in opposition to the romantic idea of the Southern belle, with her liberal education, disability, and lack of interest in being what her mother defines as “good country people.” As O'Connor herself explained, the ugly sweatshirt she gave Hulga to wear was similar to one that she herself possessed, which she used to wear “all the time, it being my policy at that point in life to create an unfavorable impression.”

After her lupus diagnosis, O'Connor spent the remainder of her life at Andalusia, a working dairy farm run by her mother, Regina. Today, the farm is a museum that still contains the O'Connors' original furniture and the descendants of the peacocks they famously raised there, along with their ponies and cattle.

Jesmyn Ward

One could make a map of fictional Mississippi that might tell deeper truths about its history than the real thing. If someone starts at Yoknapatawpha, travels 160 miles south to Thermopylae, and then keeps traveling south from there another 160 miles, they'll end up in Bois Sauvage, which is the fictionalized version of DeLisle, Mississippi, where the novelist Jesmyn Ward grew up. Bois Sauvage means “wild woods” in French, and this part of the state—its southernmost tip—is even more remote and imperiled than Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha.



While Faulkner's primary theme is decay, Ward's is survival. Her characters are not the White folks enduring the poverty of Reconstruction and the Depression—they are the descendants of the people those folks enslaved.

Ward's novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, set in Bois Sauvage, documents lives in the Kill, the fictionalized version of the neighborhood in real-life DeLisle known as the Kiln. The story centers on a boy named Jojo who lives in the shadow of the Mississippi State Penitentiary—also known as the Parchman Farm, after the family that owned the plantation land on which the prison was built. Jojo's father is incarcerated at Parchman, and Jojo is followed by the ghost of a man who died many years ago trying to escape the prison.

Parchman was a working farm structured as a camp, where inmates were forced to labor all day long in the cotton fields. The farm is notorious in Mississippi for its role in the practice of convict leasing, a system wherein prisoners were “leased” as free laborers for private enterprise. Often arrested on false or trumped-up charges, Black Mississippians were ostensibly reconsigned into slavery, forced to work long hours for no pay in inhumane conditions.

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11

Alabama and Louisiana: The Soul of the South



In this lecture, you'll stick with the South, considering writers from Alabama and Louisiana who challenged accepted notions about this rich and complex region. You'll start in Monroeville, designated the literary capital of Alabama, mostly on the basis of two of its former citizens—a pair of childhood best friends who would grow up to take the literary world by storm: Truman Capote and Harper Lee. Then, you'll travel to New Orleans, a port city in Louisiana whose history renders it a blend of African, Irish, Italian, German, Greek, and Caribbean cultures, mingling with French, Spanish, and Native American influences. The sheer number of famous writers who've drawn inspiration from the city have led many historians, scholars, and enthusiasts to consider it the soul of US literary culture.



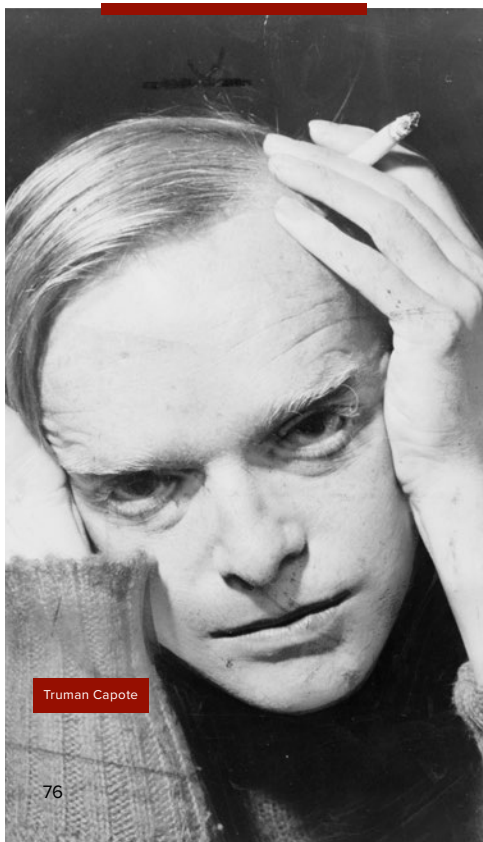
Harper Lee and Truman Capote

Nelle Harper Lee was born in Monroeville in 1926. A distant relation of Robert E. Lee, the Confederate general, and the daughter of a prominent lawyer, Lee had a firm foothold in Alabama's history.

Truman Capote's mother, Lillie Mae Faulk, was also born in Monroeville but fled to New Orleans as a teenager. She had Capote at 19, and when he was 6, she sent him to live with her sisters back in Monroeville—a house that hosted five to eight occupants at any given time, of whom all but Capote were female. Capote spent his days pretending to solve mysteries with his elderly cousin Sook and his neighbor, Lee.

Both Lee and Capote wrote about how their respective gender nonconformity formed a fast bond between them. Lee was a tomboy who often got into fights; Capote was bullied for his small stature and effeminate voice. They would serve as models for each other's characters and readers, editors, and supporters of one another's work.

Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, first published in 1960, is set in a town called Maycomb that is, like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha and Ward's Bois Sauvage—a model of the author's home. Like the novel's Atticus Finch, Lee's father, Amasa Coleman Lee, was a lawyer, as well as a state representative.



Truman Capote

In 1936, Amasa served as the defense attorney to two African American men who were accused of raping a White teenager. Young Lee was struck by how her father's clients were found guilty by an all-White jury and then sentenced to death despite their obvious innocence. Lee's novel, which is based on these events, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and has never been out of print. It continues to inspire vital classroom conversations about the inequity of the justice system in the United States.

Lee was famously by Capote's side as he researched his last masterpiece, the nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood*, which traces the story of a real-life murder in midcentury Kansas. As an adult, Lee would divide her time between Monroeville and New York City. But Capote would always consider his birthplace of New Orleans his hometown. He liked to hold court at The Carousel Bar in the Hotel Monteleone on Royal Street in the city's famed French Quarter.

Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams was born in Columbus, Mississippi—halfway between Oxford and Jackson—and raised in Missouri. Like Capote, however, Williams considered New Orleans his spiritual home.

His first residence in town was a small apartment in a two-story townhouse that was built in 1788 and is still in use today as a private home. The apartment was the setting for Williams's 1977 play *Vieux Carré*, which is about an aspiring young writer who moves to a dingy boardinghouse full of bohemians and misfits in a tourist district of New Orleans.

Over the course of the play, the character known as “the writer” goes from being the play's narrator to one of its characters. Such a transition symbolizes how the writer—a figure for Williams himself—has come to accept himself as one of the French Quarter misfits.

Vieux Carré is the French term for the French Quarter, New Orleans's most famous neighborhood. Williams also lived on St. Peter Street for a short but very significant stint from 1946 to 1947. It was there that he wrote his most famous work, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

He was fond of telling friends that the place on St. Peter was his favorite of all the apartments he occupied in the city, closely followed by the spot where he lived the longest: 1014 Dumaine Street. One thing both buildings share is the distinctive iron lacework along their balconies that is integral to the neighborhood. The poet and historian Marcus B. Christian has traced these distinctive railings to New Orleans's longtime status as a hub for the Atlantic slave trade.

Highly skilled iron workers were revered in nations of the Sahara, like the Mandingo, the Jallofs, and the Foulahs, and their skills were in high demand when they arrived, enslaved, in the American colonies. The descendants of these artists were recognized by the wealthy elite of the French Quarter and, when iron lace balconies came into vogue, many were able to buy their costly freedom by leasing out their own labor.



New Orleans's Racial History

Tennessee Williams was hardly the only one to write romantically of the French Quarter's iron-lace-draped streets and dilapidated garret apartments. Poet Charles Bukowski's crawls through the quarter's bars are quite literally cemented into the city's history. At the age of 70, Bukowski composed the poem "Young in New Orleans" about the days he worked as an errand boy for

a now defunct paper called the *New Orleans Item*, describing the “horses and buggies going by,” always driven by Black men carrying White passengers—highlighting the city’s complex relationship to race, which it has long used its literature to untangle.

One of the greatest chroniclers of the city’s racial history was George Washington Cable, whose 1880 novel *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life*, blew open the highly codified racial strata of the city.

The New Orleans Creole system included three racial types, as described in the novel—Black, White, and mixed-race. This third group held a higher status than elsewhere in the nation, where enslavement classed all people of African descent as inferior by law.

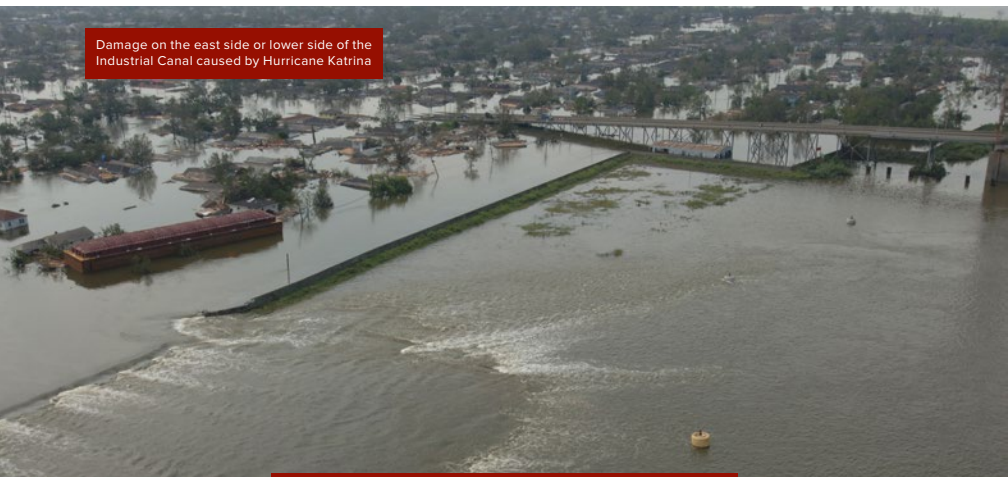
In Creole New Orleans, there was a specific system known as *plaçage* wherein mixed-race women had tacit legal privileges as the recognized consorts of White gentlemen. If the woman were enslaved, such arrangements might offer a pathway to freedom and inheritance or education for any children born of the arrangement. Whether free or not, these women were typically given their own homes. Though this was not a clear route to freedom or wealth, its existence was unique and remarkable.

Hurricane Katrina

Since 2005, Hurricane Katrina has become a compelling subject for New Orleans’ writers. Several important anthologies on the topic highlight authors from the city’s distinct wards, and novels like Chantal James’s *None but the Righteous* and James Lee Burke’s *The Tin Roof Blowdown* focus on the hurricane’s aftermath. Many of these stories show how the protagonist’s identities shape their experiences of the storm and the destruction and tragedy it brought into the lives of all New Orleanians.

Shelton “Shakespear” Alexander—a poet well known in the city’s spoken word scene—was evacuated to the Superdome during the storm and held there by the national guard, just like so many of his neighbors in the city’s

Ninth Ward. Luckily, he was able to flee along with 18 others before they experienced the mass starvation and dehydration that the 25,000 individuals forced to stay there suffered.



His spoken word poem “I Was There” recalls the failures of those in charge during the hurricane, showing how the devastation of the storm only more deeply entrenched the city’s historic struggle with racial inequity. Just as Bukowski’s driver is always Black and the passengers always White, the city’s history of environmental catastrophe has been felt sharply along racial lines due to an infrastructural pattern that renders historically Black neighborhoods more susceptible to the worst ravages of storms.

Such infrastructural problems reach all the way back into the city’s history of slavery and forward, after the storm, into the inequitable recovery efforts that further disenfranchised Ninth Ward residents in particular.

The neighborhood’s rich history needn’t be eclipsed by this latest chapter. The Ninth Ward raised jazz legends like Fats Domino and the Marsalis brothers, served as a hub during the Black Arts Movement, and is home to many of the traditions that make New Orleans’s Mardi Gras celebrations world famous. This heritage reflects the city’s history as a melting pot around the trades of the Atlantic and Caribbean, which has in turn inspired its writers.

Zora Neale Hurston and Hoodoo Culture

In 1928, a young writer named Zora Neale Hurston went to New Orleans to study the rich history of its folklore. She was a recent graduate of Barnard College with a degree in anthropology. In New Orleans, she researched what she termed hoodoo culture, also known as voodoo, among the city's leading adepts.

Hurston understood hoodoo for what it was: an exceedingly complex religious tradition with symbols and rites that have been practiced for thousands of years. Though the religion is a blend of Caribbean and African traditions, the word comes from the Haitian words for “introspection” and “into the unknown”—which is, in a sense, the function of any theological tradition. Hurston's period of research and religious exploration in New Orleans would come to inform some of her most influential writing, including her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Marie Laveau was the most prominent of the New Orleans voodoo priestesses and priests, called queens and doctors. The most famous Laveau site in town is her tomb in St. Louis Cemetery No. 1. Born at the beginning of the 19th century, Laveau was a free Black woman and a practicing Catholic. It was the blend of her voodoo and Catholic practices that most interested Hurston and inspired the author's own work.

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12

Fisticuffs in Florida



In 1929, after studying under voodoo queens and doctors in New Orleans, Zora Neale Hurston found herself back in her home state of Florida, eager to finish writing her first anthropological work. Eventually, it would become the field-defining article “Hoodoo in America,” published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1931. In this lecture, you’ll follow Hurston and travel further along the Gulf Coast to Florida to take in both her and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s love of the state’s landscape, flora, and fauna. You’ll also discover the importance of Key West to Ernest Hemingway’s impressive productivity and the inspiration Florida provided for the poets Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop.



Hurston's Florida

Zora Neale Hurston was born in Alabama to a sharecropping family. Tired of skipped paychecks and constant harassment, her parents moved to Florida in 1894 after hearing about an all-Black town—Eatonville—where opportunities were plentiful and prejudice scarce.

Growing up in their comfortable house, with plenty of food to eat, siblings to play with, and no White folks around to give them any kind of hard time, Hurston's experience was unique among her Harlem Renaissance contemporaries, most of whom came of age abroad, in the overcrowded neighborhoods of major urban centers, or in the bitter racism of the Jim Crow South.

The paradise of Hurston's Eatonville childhood would be shattered by the death of her mother in 1904, an event that inaugurated a life of travel for the researcher and writer. But Eatonville and the model it provided of free and thriving Black Americans would animate Hurston's stories for the rest of her life, as would her anthropological research.

Her first novel, 1934's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, is a semi-autobiographical narrative that follows the move of John Buddy Pearson and his wife, Lucy, from Alabama to Florida. Modeled after Hurston's own parents, the Pearsons are separated prematurely by death. John Pearson's second wife, Hattie, is clearly based on John Hurston's second wife, Mattie.



In the novel, Hattie uses hoodoo to cause Lucy's death, from which the family falls into misfortune after misfortune. *Jonah's Gourd Vine* stands as a testament to the richness of Reconstruction-era Black life, particularly in Eatonville—as does Hurston's most celebrated novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which begins when the main character, Janie, returns to Eatonville after a brief absence.

The novel tracks Janie's love affairs and ambitions as she eventually moves from Eatonville to Jacksonville with her third husband, Tea Cake. After she is acquitted of his murder, she returns to Eatonville one last time. Janie, like Zora, is ever drawn there. Hurston's fondness for and fascination with the state of Florida mean that not only are most of her fictions set there, but her history is also written in its many monuments and museums to her.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, best known as the author of *The Yearling*, met Hurston in St. Augustine in Florida when she was invited to speak at the Black Florida Normal and Industrial Institute nearby, where Hurston was an instructor. Rawlings was taken with Hurston and immediately invited her to lunch at the Castle Warden hotel, a luxurious Moorish-style castle that was originally built as a private home for the Warden family in 1887. Though it wasn't customary for Black guests or visitors to stay there in the racially divided South, Hurston had tea with Rawlings at the Castle Warden in the latter's private apartment.

Rawlings's 19th-century house at Cross Creek in Hawthorne is an authentic example of the classic architectural style known as Florida cracker, characterized by its shotgun layout and wooden porches. She lived in this house throughout the 1930s and composed *The Yearling* there. It's now a state park historic site open to visitors.

Rawlings found inspiration in the region, and though the concept of young adult fiction did not yet exist, she began writing tales that young people would grow to love for many generations. Like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,

The Yearling is the story of someone who leaves rural Florida only to return. It is full of atmospheric descriptions of the Florida landscape through the eyes of a child.

Later, Hurston would visit Rawlings at Cross Creek and the two would share their writing and ideas. Hurston wrote to Rawlings, “Whether it pleases you or not, you are my sister. You look at plants and animals and people in the way I do.” The beauty of the Florida flora and fauna served as an inspiration to both women and also attracted a significant tourist element.

The Hemingways and Key West

In the later part of the 19th century, as the presence of Warden Castle suggests, St. Augustine was a destination for the Gilded Age elite of New York that rivaled Newport and Tuxedo. However, while wealthy Old New York families chose St. Augustine as the site for rest and recreation at big estates in the late 19th century, after the 1920s, writers began to flock further down the peninsula and off the coast—to the small island of Key West.

In 1926, Pauline Pfeiffer—a journalist originally from Iowa who had become successful in New York writing for outlets like *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue*—began an affair with a hotshot married novelist who soon became her husband for a time: Ernest Hemingway. The Hemingways had been living in Paris and decided to move back to the US in 1928 because Pauline was pregnant.

They didn’t intend to stay in Key West for long, but after a few weeks there, Hemingway found it an extraordinarily productive place to write—he finished his novel *A Farewell to Arms* shortly after arriving—and Pauline fell in love with the island.

Pfeiffer’s wealthy Uncle Gus offered to finance a real estate purchase for her, and she chose a mansion on Whitehead Street. She worked tirelessly to restore the house while Ernest logged mornings at his typewriter, days on the water fishing, and nights at the island’s bars.

Hemingway’s love of drinking is legendary, and three bars on the island all claim to have been his favorite. Sloppy Joe’s Bar on Duval Street is a Key West landmark that loves to play up its Hemingway connections by selling swag

and hosting an annual Hemingway look-alike contest.

Around the corner, Capt Tony's Saloon on Greene Street claims to be "the original Sloppy Joe's" because the bar was moved to Duval Street in 1938.

But both bars are in fact homages to a previous

Hemingway watering hole, a bar called Sloppy Joe's that the writer loved in Havana, Cuba. Another place where Hemingway did some drinking was the Casa Marina hotel.



Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop

In February 1935, the poet Robert Frost made a trip to Key West and encountered another poet who had been coming to the Casa Marina since 1922 and had come to feel like the island's head literary honcho: Wallace Stevens.

They would go on to have an uneasy relationship throughout their time on the island, and Stevens resented Frost for attracting still more poets, like Elizabeth Bishop. However, both Bishop and Stevens would write memorably about Florida.

Stevens's "The Idea of Order at Key West" is widely considered one of the best modernist American poems, though Stevens is a notoriously challenging poet to parse. The poem follows a woman as she walks along the beach and sings. Her song mixes with the sounds of the beach and the ocean, rendering the lines between humanity and the natural world, reality and the imagination, blurred.

In a way, the poem is about getting outside of the self and creating art beyond the borders of the individual artist's ego. It might be a clue as to what Stevens sought in the quiet isolation of the island and why he was so miffed when other writers began to crowd it.

Nonetheless, Elizabeth Bishop became a regular visitor in the 1930s and 1940s with her girlfriend, Louise Crane. Both avid fisherwomen, they rented cheap rooms at a boardinghouse and spent most of their time on the water.

Bishop eventually bought a home on the island, where she could devote herself to writing. It was an 1890s eyebrow house, a classic Keys style so named for the overhanging porch roof that looks like eyebrows over the windows, protecting them from direct sunlight to keep the house cool.



Bishop's place still stands at 624 White Street. She wrote most of her most famous collection there, called *North & South*. Her poem "Florida" clearly shows how Key West inspired her, calling Florida

The state with the prettiest name,
the state that floats in brackish water,
held together by mangrove roots.

Judy Blume

The novelist and Key West resident Judy Blume has become beloved by children, teenagers, and adults all around the world for her candid treatment of adolescence with all of its joy and awkwardness.

Blume has written more than a dozen books, which have sold more than 80 million copies, but her greatest claim to fame is how her work has offered readers an honest treatment of topics that they often struggle to discuss with children—puberty in *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*, divorce in *It's Not the End of the World*, disability in *Deenie*, and sex in *Forever*.

Her writerly voice uncannily inhabits the minds of children at crucial ages, creating an intimacy with readers they never forget. These readers flock to the Key West bookshop where Blume spends most of her days—Books & Books. It's not a typical store but rather a nonprofit organization with a brick-and-mortar bookstore presence that has become a hub of literary activity on the island.

Things pick up even more during the 4-day literary festival held in January, bringing booklovers of all stripes to take in the beaches and breezes and meet their literary heroes past and present—probably a better way to appreciate the outsized literary history of this small island than elbowing a bunch of Hemingway look-alikes in a crowded barroom.

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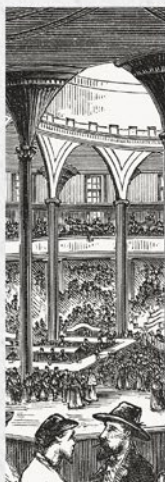
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13

Where the South Meets the West



Up until now, you've explored the Eastern Seaboard and the American South, which are regions steeped in the nation's earliest colonial histories. Now, it's time to move squarely into the part of the nation whose stories of statehood begin later, with the Missouri Compromise of 1820. First, you'll learn about the importance of Missouri to the state's most well-known literary son—Mark Twain—before examining the works of James Beckwourth, T. S. Eliot, Kate Chopin, and Maya Angelou and the connection they have to the Missouri city of St. Louis.



Mark Twain

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, known by his pen name Mark Twain, was born in Florida, Missouri. His most famous novel—*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—is set in St. Petersburg, which is based on Hannibal, Missouri, where the Clemens family moved when Twain was only 4 years old. The author lived there until he was 17, and he set a great deal of his work in the city's 16 square miles.

Twain based Tom Sawyer's house on his own childhood home on Hill Street, which is now a museum dedicated to Twain. The house is still bordered by the legendary fence that Tom Sawyer tricked the neighborhood boys into whitewashing for him.

The Becky Thatcher House is also on the tour. It's the actual home of Clemens's childhood girlfriend, Laura Hawkins, on whom he based the character. Situated just across the street from the Twain house with the white fence, it's a much larger structure than the Clemens home and houses an exhibit on what life was like for 19th-century children.

A far more modest structure lies down the hill toward the river: the two-room cabin where the Blankenship family lived when Clemens was a child. Tom Blankenship was a little boy who inhabited the cabin and the primary model for Huckleberry Finn, whom Twain described as "the juvenile pariah of the village."



Twain also based elements of the Huck character on Benson—or Bence—Blankenship, Tom's older brother. In the 1840s, Bence discovered and befriended a man who had escaped enslavement on a small, uninhabited island while out fishing on the river. This story was the basis for the plot of the novel.

The rest of the novel's details on river travel were drawn from Clemens's own experience as a riverboat pilot from 1857 to 1861. Twain would carry the allure of the steamboatman's life in the name he adopted. "Mark twain!" was the cry captains bellowed over the river when they reached 2 fathoms in depth, the minimum needed for a steamboat to pass safely at full speed.

Fur Trapping and St. Louis

In the 19th century, St. Louis was the hub of the North American fur trade, an industry that would rival whaling as the period's most profitable. Fur trappers left St. Louis to travel through the Rocky Mountains west in search of beaver and bison. In the mid-19th century, it's estimated that anywhere from 30 million to 60 million bison roamed the plains. By the end of the 19th century, only 300 were left. The North American beaver population likewise plummeted in the same period.

Fur trappers either got rich or died trying. They lived by their wits, setting out into brutal, rapidly changing climates. They were subject to starvation, exposure, and untold violence between competing groups of trappers, the region's Native inhabitants, and European exploration parties. One of the greatest chronicles of a fur trapper's adventures during this period comes from James Beckwourth, a trapper, explorer, and scout as famous for his storytelling abilities as he was for his dangerous frontier exploits.

His 1856 memoir is an extraordinarily detailed account of life among the Crow tribe, who adopted him as one of their own, and the various battles he found himself caught up in. It was a popular adventure story that was republished frequently in the early 20th century, though it has largely been forgotten today.

When Beckwourth returned to St. Louis from his own trapping adventures out west in the 1840s, he found it so developed and changed that he preferred to return to his friends and family among the Crow people.

T. S. Eliot

The poet Thomas Stearns Eliot—who would go by his initials, T. S.—was born in St. Louis and endured a painful medical condition that left him bedridden for most of his childhood. Living in the city that was the gateway to the West naturally led the ill young boy to consume frontier adventure stories. He especially loved the works of Mark Twain. Like Twain, he found inspiration in the city's proximity to the river.

The house on Locust Street where Eliot was born and raised is no longer standing, but a medallion in the sidewalk marks the spot where it once was. Locust Street may have provided some of the images of destruction and decay that populate his best-known poems from the 1920s. Though by that time Eliot had studied in Boston and lived in Europe, many critics have suggested that his mind was still lingering on the streets of St. Louis.

While living on Locust Street, young Tom went to school at Smith Academy, a few blocks to the north on Delmar Avenue. The neighborhood between the house and the academy was nicknamed Death Valley, a notoriously dangerous stretch of streets where the city's sex trade operated. Eliot walked or took the streetcar through it every day on his way to and from Smith Academy.

Eliot's first year at Smith began in 1898, and in the inaugural issue of the school journal the following April, scholars have found a curious advertisement from a local furniture store called Prufrock's in downtown St. Louis. For St. Louis residents in the period, the name Prufrock would conjure middle-class luxury, like Macy's or Sears. Eliot wrote his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" only 5 years after he moved out of the house on Locust Street. It's possible that it's the same Prufrock Eliot had in mind when he wrote of the "lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" as the traffic moved slowly through the streets below his office on Fourth Street.



Kate Chopin

Eliot wasn't the only writer living in St. Louis in 1904. He was just beginning to write as Kate Chopin's literary career was winding down. The two were born almost 40 years apart. Chopin, the famous writer of New Orleans, was actually born and raised in St. Louis. After the death of her husband, she moved back to her mother's place for a time before purchasing a house on Morgan Street in 1886. From that house, she might have walked or taken the streetcar to the Central YMCA at the corner of Franklin and Grand Avenues, where she attended meetings of the Wednesday Club—a ladies' art and literary society founded by T. S. Eliot's mother, Charlotte Eliot.

T. S. Eliot might be referencing this stuffy women's club crowd in the lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" when "in the room the women come and go / talking of Michelangelo." Chopin was probably thinking of Charlotte Eliot's club when she wrote her own satires mocking St. Louis club women in short stories like "Miss McEnders," which she published in the *St. Louis Criterion* in 1897. The story was so clearly modeled on the Wednesday Club—and such an unfavorable depiction—that the author chose to publish it anonymously. She would leave the Wednesday Club herself after less than 2 years.

Chopin's grave in the Calvary Cemetery in St. Louis is frequently visited by fans of her work. They leave seashells in tribute to the beachside setting of her most famous novel, *The Awakening*.

Maya Angelou

St. Louis also played a formative role in the work of poet and memoirist Maya Angelou, who was born as Marguerite Johnson in 1928 at 3130 Hickory Street. The Johnsons only lived at this location for the first 3 years of Marguerite's life, but the Gate District—a historically African American neighborhood—is extremely proud of their famous literary daughter.

In 1931, Angelou and her brother were sent to live with their grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas. Stamps is a small town in Missouri's neighboring state. It's 292 miles south of St. Louis, and Angelou's childhood journey is a reminder of St. Louis's identity as a border to the South as well as a gateway to the West.

After living with their grandmother in Stamps for 4 years, the kids were sent back to their parents in St. Louis. In her autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou writes of this return to the city: "St. Louis was a new kind of hot and a new kind of dirty. My memory had no pictures of the crowded-together soot-covered buildings." She compared St. Louis to a Gold Rush town, full of all types seeking adventure, riches, and amusement.

The first year back in St. Louis after her time in Arkansas was a traumatic one for Angelou. She was raped by a man who was then murdered by her uncle. Maya was sent back to Arkansas once again to live with her grandmother, Annie Mae Henderson. Believing herself to be responsible for the murder, she did not speak for 5 years.

Grandma Annie Mae ran the segregated town's only general store that catered to Black customers. A prosperous African American businesswoman living in the Jim Crow South, Annie Mae provided a powerful model for her silent young granddaughter.

Angelou left Stamps as a teenager and would never return to live there, though much of her work—including *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*—is set in the town. In 2014, just months before her death, she had planned to travel back to Arkansas to lecture at the Fayetteville Public Library. Ultimately, she was too sick to make the trip but explained in her letter to the library that she would always consider Arkansas her home.

Angelou's poem "Still I Rise," written in the late 1970s, became an anthem of the American civil rights movement and the Black feminist movement as well as an inspiration to future poets and artists. Angelou also believed that rap music was the youth's poetry and respected it alongside the poetry of her elders.

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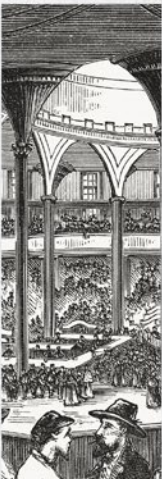
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14

The Midwest and the Dream of Postwar America



Originally built between 1811 and 1837, the National Road ran directly through Indianapolis, the site Indiana's commissioners chose for its capital. Scottish engineer Alexander Ralston, who was tasked with drawing the plan, imagined downtown Indianapolis as a symmetrical checkerboard. It can be considered the grandfather of some of America's most iconic suburbs, the ones people think of when they imagine television shows and novels set in some nameless suburban town: little uniform boxes that create a physical representation of the dream of middle-class America—a land of opportunity but also conformity, of ease but also boredom. In this lecture, you'll learn how Indianapolis and its environs gave birth to writers whose work criticized the experience of the life lived within those little boxes and how the Midwest region shaped the country's myths of the American Dream.



Booth Tarkington

In his heyday, Booth Tarkington was considered as central a writer to the American literary tradition as Mark Twain. His first successful novel, *The Gentleman from Indiana*, was made into a popular silent film in 1915. Reading the novel is like stepping into late-19th century Indiana. Tarkington's prose is full of lush descriptions of small-town Midwestern American life—its buildings, rituals, and, above all, characters.

His most enduring work is probably *The Magnificent Ambersons*, a multigenerational family saga that tells the story of Indiana high-class society and its toniest enclaves. It's set in an Indianapolis neighborhood based on Woodruff Place, one of the city's first developer-engineered suburbs.

The Magnificent Ambersons continues the theme of a town changing in the wake of industrialization that Tarkington pioneered in *The Gentleman from Indiana*. But it takes the historical trajectory further, exploring how a family that once ruled the social and political scene in the town of Indianapolis becomes dwarfed by its transformation into a city full of new manufacturing industries and business tycoons.

Tarkington won a Pulitzer Prize for the novel, which also inspired three films. However, while he made a fortune on his bestselling novels and film rights, for many years after his death, Tarkington was almost completely forgotten by the literary establishment, who grew to consider him the quintessential middlebrow novelist. Like the early suburbs his work captured, critics came to see his novels as stylistically characteristic of the compromises of suburban American life: comfortable but lacking in artistic merit or cultural substance.

Literary Buildings and Art in Indianapolis

Kurt Vonnegut, who incorporated elements of humor, science fiction, and fantasy into his work, has truly captured the heart of Indianapolis—and the writer of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and other satires loved the city as much as the city loves him.



Vonnegut's mother, Edith, was the heiress to a brewery fortune. Kurt Sr. was his father (the writer was Kurt Jr.). The family business was architecture. Buildings designed by the elder Kurt and grandfather Bernard can still be seen all over the city. But the most important stop in Indy for any Vonnegut fan is the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library. There, one can see Vonnegut's typewriter and his original drawings or purchase some Vonnegut books and swag from the well-stocked gift shop.

A giant mural portrait on Massachusetts Avenue captures the author's joyful, mischievous spirit. It's a great place to take a classic Indianapolis selfie with the author. In 2016, a companion piece was added nearby when the city commissioned local artist Michael "Alkemi" Jordan to paint a portrait of artist and poet Mari Evans. Evans was a key figure in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Though she called Indianapolis home for most of her adult life, her second poetry collection, *I Am a Black Woman*, made her a global figure with its bold call for racial justice, particularly in the titular poem.

In another of her most loved poems, "The Rebel," she speculates that after her death, her funeral will be full of people coming to see if she's actually dead or just being a troublemaker.

Toni Morrison

Less than a 2-hour drive along the coast of Lake Erie from Lorain, Toledo is the birthplace of Toni Morrison, a writer whose novels carried on the themes of the Black Arts Movement that Evans was so central to creating.

Morrison was born in the steel town of Lorain in 1931, and Lorain is the setting of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*. Her work would build upon the Black Arts Movement's celebration of Black life and experience. Unlike the Black Is Beautiful Movement, which would emerge around the same time, Morrison sought to elaborate a value of Blackness that transcended the concept of beauty. She told an interviewer how she wrote *The Bluest Eye* as a reaction, in part, to the Black Is Beautiful slogan. She worried that in the celebration of Black beauty, one might forget how the concept of beauty itself had made so many young Black girls feel. She wanted to write a story that would show how the whole concept of physical beauty was embedded in Whiteness. The character at the center of the story not only wants eyes that look like the eyes White people have but also eyes that see the world the way White people see it.

"Ohio," Morrison once wrote, "is a curious juxtaposition of what was ideal in this country and what was base." The state's location in relation to African American slavery is the root cause of this. The northern border of the state is just across Lake Erie from Canada, the destination of most who traveled the Underground Railroad to freedom. Its southern border is the Ohio River, and on the other side of the river lies Kentucky, which Morrison called "the bloody side of the river"—home to brutal enslavement and, later, the KKK. In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison captures those tensions.

Morrison would come to confront Ohio's historic importance to the Underground Railroad in her 1987 novel *Beloved*. She began to imagine the novel after learning about a Kentucky woman named Margaret Garner who escaped enslavement in 1856 by crossing the Ohio River into the free state, only to be captured by US Marshals on the other side. Garner killed her own 2-year-old daughter rather than see her be taken back into slavery.

Beloved begins after the Civil War and focuses on a Cincinnati woman named Sethe who is haunted by the ghost of a daughter she murdered under similar circumstances. The novel has captured the hearts of so many readers through its rich language, searing portrait of mother-daughter bonds, and reflection on the legacies of enslavement that haunt all Americans.

Historians estimate that in the 40 years it operated, between 1810 and 1850, the Underground Railroad system guided more than 100,000 enslaved people to freedom. The railroad metaphor determined the language of the system, with conductors guiding passengers from station to station, where they would be hidden and provided for by station masters. Station masters came from all walks of life, occupations, and income levels. Many were formerly enslaved people themselves. All were ardent abolitionists.



Shaker Heights

The nearby city of Cleveland, alongside Indianapolis, was home to some of the country's earliest planned suburbs, and many of the more contemporary fictions these places have given birth to focus on themes similar to those in the works of Tarkington: the social constraints, empty consumerism, and lack of creative expression in suburban life.

Shaker Heights may be the quintessential suburb of this American social and cultural archetype, and its best-known depiction may be the Reese Witherspoon miniseries based on Celeste Ng's 2017 novel *Little Fires Everywhere*.

Ng set her novel in the posh suburb not only because she grew up there herself but because the place is emblematic of a certain kind of American experience—one wherein the powerful ambition to fit in can be as seductive as it is destructive.

Shaker Heights was a planned community, incorporated in 1912. Members of the nonviolence religion the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing—an offshoot of Quakerism—had lived in the area since 1805. They believed in the confession of sin, the refusal to bear arms, community ownership of land, and the equality of all people, regardless of gender or race. A part of their practice was a spiritual dance, giving them the derogatory nickname of Shaking Quakers or Shakers, which eventually became incorporated into the name of the planned suburb.



In 1905, the land that would become Shaker Heights was bought by brothers M. J. and O. P. Van Sweringen, who planned a greenery and statue-laced retreat from the industrial bustle of the city. By 1963, it was statistically the

wealthiest community in the country. The March issue of *Cosmopolitan* that year described the community as a new iteration of the utopian society its earliest Shaker inhabitants imagined.

Little Fires Everywhere

The focus on the limiting conformity created by the rules of Shaker Heights sets up the central conflict of *Little Fires Everywhere*, which occurs between two different mothers who live in two very different homes.

Elena Richardson is a 1990s housewife obsessed with having the perfect suburban family. She is a third-generation Shaker resident who lives in a six-bedroom house on Parkland Drive. The Warrens live in a split-level house on the other side of town, on Winslow Road, the only street in the planned community where one can live in anything other than a single-family dwelling. The houses on Winslow Road were designed to look like single-family homes to avoid embarrassment on the part of the residents and any potential decline in real estate values associated with a rental area.

Mia Warren's entrance into the Shaker Heights community causes a stir because, like the split-level home where she lives, she doesn't exactly fit the Shaker Heights mold. She's an artist with an unconventional lifestyle and an even more unconventional past. Elena Richardson's struggles to understand Mia represent the limitations of a life with a plan. Elena, who has always charted her decisions with the precision of a ship's captain, finds herself adrift when confronted with Mia's far freer way of thinking and behaving.

In a sense, their conflict mirrors the compromises of the planned communities of the Midwest. Of course, reality is far more complicated than fiction, and though the uniformity and conformity of places like Shaker Heights is a lived reality for some, the fiction of the Midwest suburbs has tended to emphasize their constraints.

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15

The Neighborhoods of Chicago



While the manicured enclaves of the suburban United States claim an outsized role in the country's cultural narratives of modern malaise, it's just as easy to feel like an outsider in a city. In this lecture, you'll explore the neighborhoods of Chicago to take in some of the city's most celebrated works—from the literary naturalism of Theodore Dreiser to the realism and awareness-raising of Upton Sinclair and Richard Wright, both of whom sought to utilize the power of fiction to draw attention to systemic injustices, affect social change, and transform their city for the better.



Sister Carrie's Chicago

Theodore Dreiser's first novel, *Sister Carrie*, was published in the first year of the 20th century. It follows its young protagonist, Carrie, as she leaves her small Wisconsin hometown to join her sister Minnie and her brother-in-law Sven in Chicago. On the train ride there, she meets a traveling salesman named Charles Drouet, who becomes smitten with and doggedly pursues her. Carrie is horrified by the hard lives of her sister and brother-in-law, who labor constantly to make the bare minimum to pay for food and lodging.

When Carrie finds work in a shoe factory, it takes far too much of a toll on her body and spirit, leaving her with little money or time for leisure or excitement—the reasons she moved to Chicago in the first place. Dreiser's novel seems to ask its readers: What happens to individuals born in poor circumstances who want more than a life of industrial labor?

The fictional Carrie arrives in Chicago at the turn of the 20th century. At the time, it was the fastest growing city in recorded history. Nearly 1.7 million people from all different backgrounds called the Windy City home in 1900—compared to only 300,000 just 30 years before. In the novel, Carrie is determined to discover everything the crowded streets and towering buildings of Chicago have to offer, the likes of which she'd never known in Wisconsin.



Drouet takes Carrie out to a fancy lunch to impress her at the now defunct Windsor Hotel, but his attempts to woo her pale in comparison to those of the wealthier bar manager George Hurstwood, who lives on the North Side of Chicago near Lincoln Park in a fashionable home with his wife and two children.

In the Lincoln Park neighborhood, one can still see mansions like the Hurstwoods' in the architectural style of the 1880s and 1890s—known as the post-fire style after the famous fire that razed the city in 1871. But the Hurstwood family's domestic bliss is shattered by Mr. Hurstwood's desire for Carrie.

Naturalist and Realist Fiction in Chicago

Dreiser was a literary naturalist. Naturalist novels typically subscribe to the theory of social Darwinism—that modern society is a competition for survival and only the fittest will escape decline and ruin. By the logic of a literary naturalism based on social Darwinian ideas, a character's choices lead them to either dizzying success or spiraling decline when faced with the high stakes of modern urban life in the industrial era. In the case of *Sister Carrie*, Hurstwood declines while Carrie rises.

Not only does Hurstwood cheat on his wife with Carrie, but he also ends up stealing from his employers to fund his plan to run away with her to New York. They live there together for a time, but Hurstwood can't keep her happy for long—Carrie's sights are set on a theatrical career. Carrie leaves him after he's sacrificed his family and his livelihood for her, and her acting career results in fortune and stardom. Hurstwood ends up begging for change on the street and ultimately ends up taking his own life in a Bowery lodging house.

During this period, the lack of proper social safety nets or labor regulation made poverty an epidemic in cities across the country. As workers began to unionize and argue for better treatment, Chicago became a hotbed of labor unrest and violence.

Upton Sinclair was a Chicago novelist who was a realist rather than a naturalist—subscribing to fiction’s power to effect social change and raise awareness about social issues. In 1904, the journalist and novelist went undercover as a worker in Chicago’s meatpacking stockyards, the industry most notorious for the poor treatment of its workers and the unsanitary conditions they faced.

Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* tells the story of Jurgis Rudkus, a Lithuanian immigrant who arrives in Chicago for much the same reasons as Carrie and, like Carrie, finds labor conditions in Chicago to be untenable. But Rudkus ends up in jail rather on the stage and then becomes a beggar like Hurstwood. His luck changes, though, because he falls in with the Socialist Party, of which Sinclair and Dreiser were members.

Richard Wright and the Rage of *Native Son*

Perhaps the most controversial text to come out of the city following *The Jungle* was Richard Wright’s 1940 naturalist novel *Native Son*—which tells the tale of Bigger Thomas, a young man living in segregated housing in a South Side Chicago neighborhood called Douglas.

African Americans had occupied the South Side of Chicago since before the Civil War, but their community expanded during the period of migration from the South that began at the end of the 19th century. By the 1890s, the small African American community in the South Side now included a strip extending further south that came to be known as the Black Belt. Black-owned banks, churches, community centers, and businesses opened up along the belt. By the 1920s, the area that included Douglas and the neighboring Grand Boulevard was a thriving center of African American life to rival Harlem.

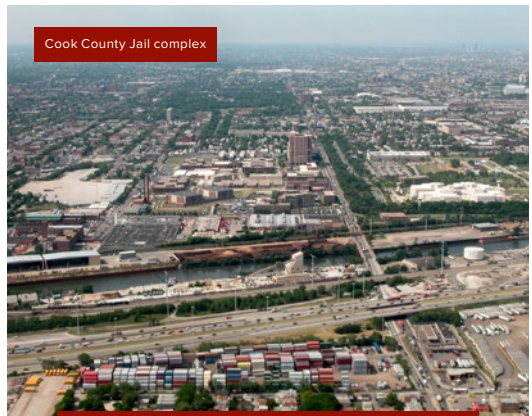
In the early 1930s, the federal government inaugurated a program called the Federal Housing Administration, which rated neighborhoods on investment worthiness, effectively standardizing racism at the national level by deeming predominately African American neighborhoods “hazardous for investment.”

Once they were deemed such—or redlined—property values would sink and so then would tax revenue, leaving no resources for municipal services. As a result, the neighborhood and the buildings fell into disrepair, and the landlords—typically wealthy White people who did not live in the neighborhood—faced no accountability for the conditions to which they subjected their overcharged tenants.

In addition, it became difficult if not impossible for Chicago's Black residents to rent or buy outside of redlined districts. So, whether they were resourced or not—like Bigger's family—African Americans had little choice but to live in poorly maintained and overcrowded buildings by the 1940s. The result of this, according to Wright, was an ever-growing rage.

Bigger is angry, isolated, alone, and in desperate circumstances. He gets a job as a chauffeur for a man he has good reason to hate: a millionaire who owns the building in which Bigger lives. But rather than depict this millionaire as a greedy villain, Wright renders him almost sympathetic, suggesting rather radically that the problem is systemic rather than personal.

When Bigger kills the millionaire's daughter, he flees in fear and winds up murdering his own girlfriend as well before being elaborately hunted down and put on trial. The Cook County Jail complex still stands as a reminder to readers of the novel's tragic end—the area contains the neoclassical courthouse where Bigger's trial is held, the jail where he awaits execution, and the Cook County Morgue, where his body ends up after he is murdered by electric chair.



Gwendolyn Brooks and Sandra Cisneros

Richard Wright lived in a second-floor apartment in Bronzeville and wrote both *Native Son* and his 1945 autobiography *Black Boy* while he was living there. At the time, despite the systemic racism that was tearing the neighborhood apart, the culture of the neighborhood still managed to thrive. Wright's group, the South Side Writers Group, nurtured the poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

Brooks's first collection of poems, *A Street in Bronzeville*, was published by Harper & Brothers in 1945. The poet Paul Engle's review of the book in the *Chicago Tribune* stated, "The publication of *A Street in Bronzeville* is an exceptional event in the literary life of Chicago, for it is the first book of a solidly Chicago person."

Brooks's poems, such as "kitchenette building," paint indelible portraits of how, in Bronzeville, beauty can be found even among decay—dreams daring to exist among the smell of garbage and Black beauty and imagination alongside White discrimination and neglect.



When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visited the neighborhood to argue for fair housing in 1966, he was attacked with bricks by a racist White mob. Finally, in 1968, the Fair Housing Act was passed, which began the long fight to end racist housing practices that is still being waged today.

The later 20th century still saw neighborhoods that were created by racist real estate practices but that, ironically, also brought ethnic groups together to realize exceptional human potential. Humboldt Park, on the city's northwest side, became such a neighborhood for Chicago's burgeoning Puerto Rican community after Puerto Rican immigrants were forced out of other neighborhoods.

The anti-Hispanic prejudice of the city, as well as overlaps in their cultural values and identities, brought different Latinx communities together in Chicago. Today, Humboldt Park is as Mexican as it is Puerto Rican. Arguably, its most famous author is Mexican as well.

Sandra Cisneros's 1983 work *The House on Mango Street* is a series of poetic vignettes that document the author's own childhood in the neighborhood. It follows its main character, Esperanza Cordero—based on Cisneros—through a single year of her life. Her family lives in a rundown house in Humboldt Park made of crumbling brick but harbors dreams of having a beautiful family home one day.

Esperanza is plagued by more than racism. Her status as a teenage girl in a struggling society renders her a repeated victim of abuse and harassment. Nevertheless, like Cisneros herself, Esperanza grows into a proud Chicana woman, committed to helping others like herself succeed and express themselves.

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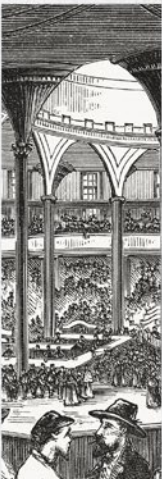
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16

The Wild West



When you imagine the North American West, what comes to mind? A horse rider galloping across the open plains or cattle dotting rolling hills? In this lecture, you'll explore the myths and legends of the Wild West, which have so thoroughly mixed in with the actual history of the West that it can be hard to determine what actually happened and what was invented or exaggerated. In doing so, you'll see how writers like Owen Wister, Jack Schaefer, and Zane Grey created cowboy tales and, subsequently, a particular image of the West that would be perpetuated throughout the 20th century and that exists in the imaginations of most Americans: the myth of savage natives and graceful, just cowboys.



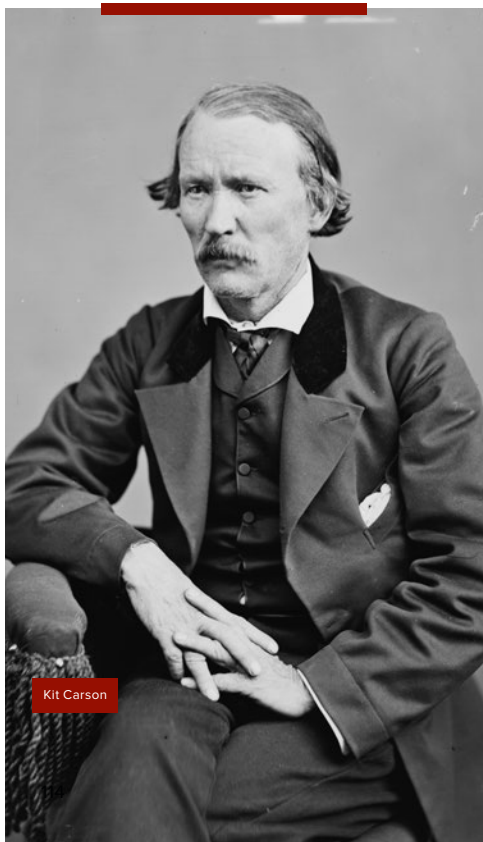
The Frontier Myth

At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition—the famous Chicago world's fair—University of Wisconsin Professor of History Frederick Jackson Turner presented a paper on the significance of the Western frontier. Standing at the podium in the World's Congress Auxiliary Building, Turner addressed a large group of historians gathered for the American Historical Association conference that was held at the fair and declared: “The frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.”

Leading up to this bold claim, Turner had elaborated on how the culture of the Western frontier had defined and distinguished the whole of American intellectual culture. According to Turner, the features of the unique American culture wrought by the Wild West included democracy, egalitarianism, a celebration of popular or low culture, and an ever-present potential for violence.

Turner believed that because the United States contained within it the frontier experience and its romanticization, Americans were able to envision a unique kind of liberty distinct from the European imagination, which was still so mired in the cultural conventions of its earlier feudal period.

For many years, this work—and Turner's view of the frontier in general—was accepted by historians and taught in academic history departments. Only in the



1980s did historians begin to argue that Turner's idea was based more on tall tales than fact—and that it not only left out many stories of the formation of America's distinct culture in other regions and among other groups but also erased what was lost or minimized through the physical and cultural genocides of the tribal nations.

In the years following the world's fair, dime novels featuring Buffalo Bill and other larger-than-life Western heroes like Kit Carson and Wild Bill Hickok would be found at general stores across North America. But the Western genre's most celebrated figure—that of the soft-spoken, tough-as-nails cowboy—wouldn't emerge until the beginning of the 20th century. The story of how that character came to be begins in July 1885, with a 25-year-old Philadelphian who would go on to write what most literary scholars consider to be the first novel in the genre now known as the Western.

The Virginian's West

Owen Wister got the idea for his bestselling 1902 novel, *The Virginian*, from a trip he made into the Wyoming Territory in July 1885. It tells the story of a cowboy who falls in love with a Vermont schoolteacher and follows his trail from Casper through the Teton Range and into Idaho—the same route Wister took on his 1885 trip.

The novel begins with an easterner's arrival in the town of Medicine Bow. He is immediately smitten with a tall, handsome cowboy known only as The Virginian. On the easterner's first night in a Medicine Bow saloon, someone calls the handsome stranger a dirty name, and he lays a pistol on the table and instructs the man, "When you call me that, smile!" The hardscrabble ways of The Virginian and Wister's romantic descriptions of the Wyoming Territory ignited the imaginations of Wister's readers back east. The novel has been made into film five times, including a 1929 production with Gary Cooper as The Virginian.

The greatest impact of *The Virginian* has undoubtedly been in its many imitations. It identified a market of readers clamoring for adventure tales of the American West that featured a similar kind of character. Before the Lone Ranger or Clint Eastwood came The Virginian. Writers like Zane

Grey (a dentist from Ohio) and Louis L'Amour (an itinerant worker who lived around the West for many years) carried on in Wister's tradition, as did cheaply produced magazine stories that expanded on versions of these themes.

Many of these pulp magazine stories featured accounts of White women captured by Indians who subsequently needed rescuing. Like *The Virginian*, these were typically highly romanticized versions of barely true stories told and retold until they were written down and sold by writers, many of whom never set foot in the American West.

Challenging the Accepted Narrative

It is true that a few White women were taken as prisoners of war by tribal nations in the course of their battle for territory with the settlers along the main trails headed to Oregon and California. Several of these women wrote their own accounts of their experiences. For instance, Fanny Kelly published *Narrative of My Captivity among the Sioux Indians* in 1871.

Kelly's family set out on the Oregon Trail for many reasons—in the hopes of making money and also to help Fanny's much older husband's ailing health. As the party was crossing Little Box Elder Creek in what is now Converse County in Central Wyoming, they were approached by a group of Oglala soldiers painted for war. Initially, their interaction with Kelly's party was peaceful, but then a tribal messenger arrived to report to their chief that a group of their party had been murdered by US soldiers at a nearby riverbank. This news agitated the Oglala, and fighting broke out between them and Kelly's party. The women and children were taken captive, but that evening, Fanny and her adopted daughter Mary attempted to escape. Mary was killed, but Fanny was taken as a prisoner of war, and she lived among the Oglala for 5 months.

Fanny Kelly's account of her captivity offers a far different view of the relationships between Native and White peoples during this period than the fictional accounts of White captives would have readers believe. Kelly is understandably eager to return to her family, but she notes the many kindnesses of her captors, who provided her with appropriate food and

clothing and even books in English for her entertainment. She is given a young girl to care for, as they presume she misses her daughter, and feasts are held to honor her.

For almost a month of her captivity, Kelly lived with an Oglala family, and she reported that she was treated “with almost affectionate kindness, not only by them, but by every member of the little community.” As her narrative progresses, she shifts her sympathies in the war for the possession of the Western plains from the White settlers to their native inhabitants, noting how the Indians’ supposedly violent behavior was the natural product of White incursion into their ancestral homelands and the ways in which the Natives understood the Whites to be treacherous and deceitful in negotiating their contracts.



Homestead and Cattle Ranch Conflict

As the century progressed, stories shifted from featuring encounters with Natives as a central conflict to a focus on the growing animosity between small family homestead farms and the great open-range cattle ranches that had come to dominate the region. Perhaps the most popular of these novels was Jack Schaefer’s 1949 *Shane*. The eponymous protagonist is a character

very much like Wister's Virginian—reticent but tough. The novel is narrated by a young boy on a homestead farm under attack by a large neighboring ranch. The ranchers repeatedly try to scare the homesteaders away from their property, but they are saved when the laconic ranch hand Shane arrives to work for them. The 1953 film version of the novel was both a box office and critical success that further spread the myth of the cowboy character first popularized by Wister.

However, while Wister's novel is more sympathetic to the big-time ranchers, Schaefer's *Shane* places its sympathies firmly with the little guys. Subsequent works inspired by the conflict have tended to side with the latter as well, as underdog stories are typically more popular than tales of the domination of big industry.

Zane Grey's 1921 novel *To the Last Man* is loosely based on a particular cattle war—one that took place in Northern Arizona between a group of local toughs called the Hashknife gang and the Aztec Land and Cattle Company of Boston. Grey's 1934 novel *The Code of the West* has had an enormous influence on the mythical Western culture in its creation of what's known as the cowboy code or cowboy ethics. The novel's plot is yet another land and cattle feud, following two Shane-like cowboys who come to the aid of a threatened ranch. Justice is served by following what Grey's narrator describes as an unwritten code of the West, but after the novel, it came to be written down and disseminated. It consists of 10 rules:



- 1 Live each day with courage.
- 2 Take pride in your work.
- 3 Always finish what you start.
- 4 Do what has to be done.
- 5 Be tough but fair.
- 6 When you make a promise, keep it.
- 7 Ride for the brand.
- 8 Talk less and say more.
- 9 Remember that some things aren't for sale.
- 10 Know where to draw the line.
- 11 In 2010, the state of Wyoming signed an act into law declaring the code of the West as the official state code. The Wyoming Boys and Girls Club teaches the code to young people, and children are tested on it in grade school history classes.

To visit the West is to watch myth blend into reality. The details of the lives of real historical people, like Bill Cody, become subsumed by the way they've featured as characters in stories—more akin to heroes of tall tales like Paul Bunyan than flesh-and-blood people whose actions had consequences far beyond their own lives.

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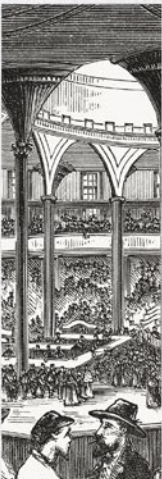
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The Literature of American Indian Reservations



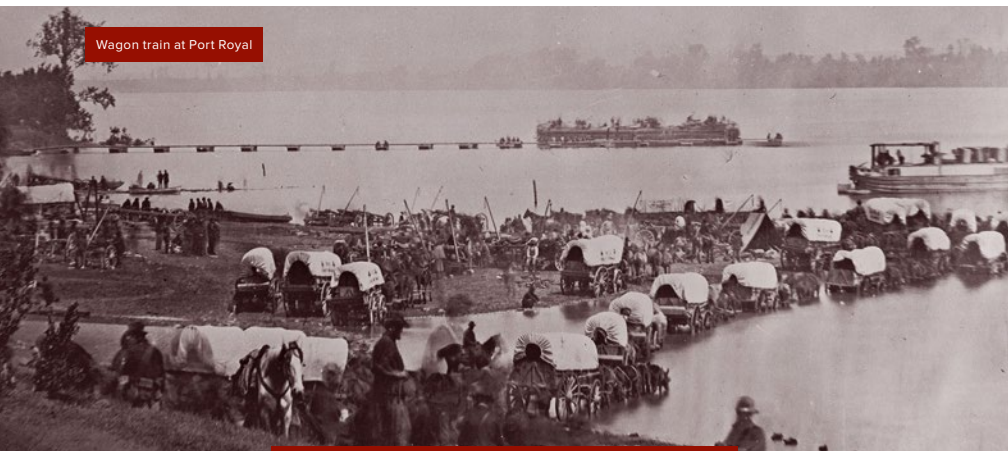
The struggle to raise awareness of how violence against Native Americans has shaped American culture and continues to be a part of its infrastructure today is a constant one—but the work of Native activists, writers, and artists has continued to make their lives, culture, and political rights increasingly more visible. The result is a richer understanding of America's collective past. In this lecture, you'll take a look at these writers of the new American West alongside the literary traditions of the nation's Indian reservations.



The Western Genre

The protagonist of New York novelist Hernan Diaz's 2017 novel *In the Distance* is a Swedish immigrant who is separated from his brother when they board different ships to America. While his brother ends up in New York, the main character mistakenly arrives at San Francisco. Penniless and alone, he embarks on a series of strange adventures en route to find his brother. He encounters a naturalist studying the plains, criminals, patent medicine salesmen, religious fanatics, a sadistic sheriff, and a number of Native Americans, in addition to the crowds of immigrants making their way along the overland trails to begin their new American lives.

The novel begins around 1850, a period of a massive migration westward. Hundreds of would-be pioneers and homesteaders from all around the world form ever-expanding wagon trains that Diaz describes as slowly moving cities making their way from the East—where most European immigrants arrived—to the Western coast for gold, or to the plains to establish farms and homesteads.



Diaz's West is global. Characters speak multiple languages, and no one is familiar with their surroundings. He collapses time and space into a flattened vastness where a traveler has to continually reinvent themselves to accommodate new circumstances and companions.

Because both foreignness and the myths and legends of the West are so central to narratives about American culture and consciousness, the Western seems an ideal genre for writers looking to endorse or question guiding concepts like rugged individualism and Manifest Destiny.

The way Western stories animate a tension between the desire to build a home and the desire for adventure is the heart of the genre for Wallace Stegner. His 1971 novel *Angle of Repose* won a Pulitzer Prize and was voted the best 20th-century novel about the Western United States by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Unlike Diaz, Stegner spent a significant amount of time in the West and is sometimes referred to as “the dean of Western writers,” as much for the renown of his works about the region as for his founding of the creative writing program at Stanford University.

Wallace modeled many of his Western characters after his father, George—figures who seek personal gain at the expense of loved ones, comfort, and culture. These determined cowboys are often paired with characters based on his mother—an educated and cultured woman from the East who longed for a stable home life that never materialized and instilled in her son a love of reading and a curiosity about the world of arts and letters.

Almost all of Stegner’s well-developed characters are pioneers, settlers, and their descendants—not the people who are actually native to the North American West. This trope is true of many Western stories, new and old, because it’s baked into the genre to tell only half of the story—or, at least, to tell only half of the story well.

Reservation Literature

The work of the Oglala Lakota Sioux poet Layli Long Soldier speaks to the complex literary history of America’s Indigenous nations, many of which eschew written language. It chronicles the many broken treaties and murders that occurred throughout the Reservation Era—as Native American historians refer to the period from 1850 to 1887—when most of the Indigenous peoples were forcibly relocated to reservations.

There are 325 Indian reservations in the United States. Like the crowded neighborhoods of Harlem in New York and Bronzeville in Chicago that brought Black Americans from all regions of the nation (and world) together under oppressive circumstances, most of the nation's reservations combine peoples from different cultures and situate them together in places that are often far away from their ancestral homelands. But these places have likewise become cultural epicenters where Indigenous stories and knowledge are preserved—and where new American art and literature is being created.

The history of reservation literature is as long as the history of the reservations themselves. The 1883 narrative *Life among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims* by Sarah Winnemucca chronicles the first 40 years of contact between her people—the Piutes of present-day Nevada and California—and European settlers in the context of her own experience.



Indigenous tribes across the US

Winnemucca uses the text, which is full of fascinating details of precolonial Piute life, to speak to White readers, urging them to take seriously the cultural heritage of her people and the injustices they faced in the postcolonial era. Watching the way the White settlers treat both her own people and the African Americans they've enslaved, she worries that the ways of her people—which she understands to be more humane—will be lost.

Winnemucca saw firsthand a number of violent acts committed by White settlers. She witnessed the murders of both of her uncles, the attempted rape of her sister, the senseless burning of her tribe's food stores, and two wars between her tribe and US soldiers.

In the 1870s, she became an interpreter for the Indian Office, which exposed her to the lies and schemes of Indian agents. These low-level government officials typically accepted their posts to fatten their own pockets and those of their friends, not to aid the displaced peoples they were charged with housing and feeding. The corruption of Indian agents and the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a whole is a persistent theme in reservation literature, especially in the early 20th century.

Zitkala-Ša and N. Scott Momaday

In 1923, the Dakota-born writer-activist Zitkala-Ša or Red Bird—also known by her English name Gertrude Simmons Bonnin—traveled through Oklahoma in her capacity as a research agent of the Indian Rights Association, an organization founded in 1882.

Zitkala-Ša spent 4 weeks with the Sioux agencies to investigate abuses against the Choctaw, Creek, and other tribes on their reservations. The title of her report is telling: “Oklahoma’s Poor Rich Indians: An Orgy



Zitkala-Ša, also known
as Gertrude Bonnin

of Graft and Exploitation of the Five Civilized Tribes—Legalized Robbery.” Unsurprisingly, it reads as a remarkable catalog of treachery for financial gain, from charging Dakota families exorbitant burial costs when they lost their dead to the seemingly endless appropriation of land, food, and funds meant for Dakota survival.

Some of Zitkala-Ša’s most moving works deal with the Indian boarding schools that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to rob Native Americans of their children. Once she learned that the government paid the schools for every child successfully taken from their families on the reservations, she came to understand that the true purpose of the schools was the erasure of Native cultures.

She then devoted herself to producing literature that, like Winnemucca’s autobiography, would show the loving and generous nature of her people to fight the pernicious stereotype perpetuated by Western fictions that they were violent savages.

N. Scott Momaday’s 1968 novel *House Made of Dawn* is widely regarded by literary critics as a breakthrough novel in the tradition of 20th-century Native American literature. It follows the character Abel, a veteran returning to his Southwestern reservation after World War II, who no longer feels at home among his people. He’s clearly suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder, made worse by the desolation he encounters on the reservation. But the reservation is also a powerful draw. It’s his home, and his dying grandfather is there.

Momaday himself joined his ancestors in 2024, having had the opportunity to see the Native American literary tradition grow beyond even his own expectations. When Momaday published *House Made of Dawn* in 1968, six Indian authors had published a total of nine novels. By the early 1990s, there were more than 30 novels in print by authors identifying as Indian.

A Growing Native American Literary Tradition

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee is a landmark history published by Dee Brown in 1970. For the first time, Brown's book told the history of American expansion from a Native point of view, crafting a new narrative of American history that writers still draw upon. Works like Ned Blackhawk's 2023 *The Rediscovery of America* add to this rich historical tradition with new findings and insights that recenter North America's first inhabitants in the telling of the nation's story.

More recent Native American writers have continued to build upon American's ever-growing knowledge of this history by spinning oral tradition, new research, and family stories into intergenerational sagas that explore Native resistance to attempts at erasure, violence, and cultural genocide.

Mona Susan Power's 2023 novel *A Council of Dolls* follows three generations of Dakota girls and their dolls. The three female voices that carry the text confide to their dolls the secrets of their experiences at the Indian boarding schools.

Sissy, the first narrator, lives in 1960s Chicago. The traces of their culture are everywhere, but they carry the erasure of colonialism with them. The narrator of Part Two, Lillian, grows up on the Standing Rock Reservation during the Great Depression and attends an Indian boarding school, just like Power's own mother did. And Part Three's narrator, Cora, is based on her mother's mother, who was living at the Standing Rock Reservation when their leader Sitting Bull was murdered by reservation police outside of the cabin where he was living with his family.

Though popular culture has begun to recognize the centrality of Native life to all American history, the individual lives of those who reside on reservations today are still too forgotten, especially the lives of Indigenous women. Native women living on reservation land are 10 times more likely to be murdered than non-Native women elsewhere.

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Landscapes of Red Rocks and Prairies



In 1848, following the Mexican-American War, the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo made the present-day states of California, Nevada, Utah, the majority of Arizona, and parts of New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming a part of US territory for the first time. Though those living in these regions were now Americans, their cultural traditions and practices continued to be shaped by the legends and practices of the Hispanic and Indigenous cultures that had long dominated the area. In this lecture, as you travel south to New Mexico, you'll consider a region shaped by its Native culture as well as its long Spanish colonial history.



Rudolfo Anaya

Rudolfo Anaya is considered by many critics to be the grandfather of Southwestern literature. His 1972 novel *Bless Me, Ultima* is based on his own childhood growing up in New Mexico. In the novel, the town is called Guadalupe, but its features are reflective of many small towns in the region that benefit from a shared history.

Anaya blends the region's religious beliefs, folklore, and oral traditions into his story of Antonio, a young boy growing up in Guadalupe, with help from a mysterious healer named Ultima. In New Mexico's Hispano culture, healers—or *curanderos*—provide traditional medical care, often in the absence of more modern medical techniques.

Ultima's mystical presence and otherworldly powers have led many critics to understand Anaya's novel as a work of magical realism, but Anaya himself has said that his work is drawn directly from life—magic and all. In the novel, Ultima fills the role of a wise ancestor, passing on her knowledge to the younger generation.

Like many children raised at a cultural crossroads, Anaya's protagonist has to figure out how his own life fits into the much larger picture of his history. His father is a vaquero, a cowboy, who lives as one with the llano—the vast plains desert region where vaqueros work rounding up cattle.

But Antonio knows the life of a vaquero is not for him. Neither is the life of his mother's people, who are farmers. Rather, Antonio—like Anaya himself—is a collector of stories. Children like Antonio raised in New Mexico's Hispano culture are taught many local legends, and Anaya's work shows that a powerful connection to the land can be forged by recording it in story.

Anaya went on to become an award-winning novelist, one of the most famous chroniclers of the American Southwest and its people, and an important figure in the Chicano rights movement that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. He started a creative writing program at the University of New Mexico and opened a retreat for aspiring Latino writers in Jemez Springs, New Mexico.

In the early 20th century, artists and writers would come to this region from all over the world to experience its beauty and record stories that had never been put down in writing: tales of Mexican and Spanish colonization from the perspective of the colonized rather than the colonizer, legends that animated the spiritual beliefs of the region, and—perhaps most importantly to the Anglo writers—descriptions of its otherworldly landscapes that haunted the minds of their readers, most of whom would never see this part of the nation in person.

Mabel Dodge Luhan

One of the Eastern tastemakers and writers who would perhaps do the most to put the American Southwest on the map of global literary and artistic destinations was a somewhat unlikely candidate—the New York socialite Mabel Dodge Luhan.

Mabel's closest friends during an early period of her life were the modernist writer Gertrude Stein and her brother Leo, who in turn were friends with French existentialist writers like André Gide. These writers and artists imagined a European modernism inspired by African art forms and a desire to seek out more “authentic” cultures to draw upon for their own work.

On November 30, 1917, the Jewish American painter and sculptor Maurice Sterne wrote Mabel a letter from New



Mabel Dodge Luhan

Mexico that would change the course of her life: “Do you want an object in life?” he asked her. “Save the Indians, their art-culture—reveal it to the world!”

Mabel would go on to do that in a sense, but her real literary contribution was a large-scale memoir project that took the shape of four volumes—published in the 1930s and 1940s—about her life in the Southwest: *Lorenzo in Taos*, *Winter in Taos*, *Edge of Taos Desert*, and *Taos and Its Artists*. These memoirs tell the story of an East Coast socialite who yearns for experiences of the broader world and grows to become a gifted writer, art critic, and organizer. They also remain an unforgettable record of what early 20th-century New Mexico was like for someone from the East who had never seen it before.

Mabel’s biographer Lois Rudnick writes that her life in Taos and her patronage of the writers who she brought to stay there argued “for a literature that took up an ‘original’ relationship with the universe, one independent of the texts and metaphors of previous ages and artists.” While previous literary works built on the traditions of the European literary past, Mabel favored a modernism that drew directly from the land and the traditional arts of the people who had lived on it for thousands of years.

Mabel would introduce many famous figures to New Mexico—the choreographer Martha Graham, the writer Aldous Huxley, and the photographer Ansel Adams, whose first book, *Taos Pueblo*, was the first publication of photographs of the town. Mabel’s husband Tony made the book possible by arranging permission for Adams from the governor and the town council.

Willa Cather

Mabel also invited the American novelist Willa Cather and her partner, the journalist Edith Lewis, to come and visit her in Taos. But unlike most of Mabel’s visitors, Cather had been through the region before.

At the time, she had just published a novel called *The Professor's House*, which features descriptions of a pueblo modeled after the ruins of the cliff-dwelling civilization at Mesa Verde in Southern Colorado, about 200 miles northwest of Taos.

Edith Lewis wrote about a trip she and Cather took to Mesa Verde in the summer of 1915. They had hired a guide only to discover he was perhaps less knowledgeable than they were. The party got lost, but they did eventually get to see the remarkable ruin that archeologists call Cliff Palace in what is now Mesa Verde National Park.

The Professor's House was published in 1925. By then, Cather was already researching her great Southwestern novelistic masterpiece *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, which would come out 2 years later.

Death Comes for the Archbishop is a 19th-century-set historical novel that tells the story of Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy, the first archbishop of New Mexico. Lamy was responsible for the construction of St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe, and he is buried under its floor.

In the novel, Cather renames the archbishop Jean-Marie Latour and paints him as sympathetic to the Natives and Hispanos who lived there prior to his arrival. The character of Latour sees the removal of the Navajos from their homelands as an act of terror as despicable as African American enslavement, and the narrator condemns the frontiersman Kit Carson's actions toward the Navajo.



Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy

While Cather was a White writer from the Nebraskan plains, her work remains one of the earliest novelistic accounts of the people original to New Mexico, and it is largely an accurate and sympathetic one.

The Great Plains Trilogy

The present-day Indigenous/Latina writer Kali Fajardo-Anstine writes of her first encounter with *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, recalling a feeling of recognition that washed over her as she read:

This feeling of recognition, of being glimpsed at the periphery of a great American writer's consciousness, was not an experience accustomed to me. It had occurred more directly in the pages of Rudolfo Anaya and Arturo Islas, but their seminal works are set well into the twentieth century. Entering the world of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was perhaps the first time I felt the narrative universe of my family's oral tradition converging with the novel form. Is this what it feels like, I had thought, to read as the majority? To see yourself and your history in books nearly every time you crack open a spine?

Cather captured a people and a region in a singular way that would resonate with writers for generations to come. While she wrote multiple novels with Southwestern settings, Cather is best known for her works that center on the Nebraska territory where she grew up.

Cather's Great Plains Trilogy consists of three novels—*O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *My Ántonia*. All three feature breathtaking descriptions of life on the Great Plains as well as strong female characters that recode conventional gender roles of the Western genre. The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie is a preserved grasslands near the Kansas border, just down the road from the author's hometown of Red Cloud, Nebraska. Red Cloud is the setting for 6 of the 12 novels Cather wrote.

Nestled in the heart of the Great Plains, Red Cloud experiences moderate temperatures and rainfall and is surrounded by grassland dotted with few trees. Though this part of the country may at times look bleak—flat and characterized by sameness—prairies and grasslands are some of the most complex and endangered ecosystems on Earth. These biomes foster a diversity of organisms on par with the rainforests or the coral reefs, though most of this activity occurs below ground.

In downtown Red Cloud, one can find many of the buildings that appear in the Great Plains Trilogy. For example, there's the original train depot, Cather's childhood home, and the Cather family's second home, which is now owned by the Willa Cather Foundation and used as a guesthouse for visiting writers, scholars, and paying guests lucky enough to snag a room.

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Central Californian Farms and Fisheries



The Willa Cather Memorial Prairie in Nebraska and Rudolfo Anaya's *Ilano* along the Texas-New Mexico border extend southeast to Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas to form a region known during the 1930s as the Dust Bowl. All six states were impacted by the late 19th-century settlement of the region, when the Homestead Act parceled the land into farms. Newly arrived farmers employed European agricultural techniques that destroyed the native prairie grasses, and dry weather and high winds turned soil to dirt and the dirt to dust, producing black blizzards that darkened the skies. Thousands of families were displaced, facing dire poverty, thirst, and starvation. Many made their way west to central California, creating a migration far smaller than that of the African Americans who moved east at the turn of the century—but one that would become famous through its documentation, as you will see in this lecture.



Manuel Muñoz and Sanora Babb

Manuel Muñoz's third short story collection, *The Consequences* from 2022, focuses on Mexican and Mexican American farmworkers in California's Central Valley in the 1980s. Muñoz's work is often set in the Central Valley, home to a large migrant community who produce about a third of the fruits and vegetables the nation consumes—and most of whom are native Spanish speakers.

In his stories, Muñoz unravels the full complexity of life in and out of the fields. The waste of the agricultural industry becomes a metaphor for how the food production system seasonally discards its laborers as well.

Writers like Muñoz celebrate the individuality and humanity of workers who are so often anonymized or seen as a threat to the year-round population. This was also how Californians thought about the Okies—the Dust Bowl's migrant agricultural workers—in the 1930s and part of the reason the government decided to send writers and artists to migrant camps. These efforts were part of a national campaign to humanize a growing refugee population subject to discrimination and contempt by the dominant population.



Sanora Babb was a seasoned writer who wanted to explain to the rest of the country what its agricultural workers were going through in the realest possible terms. She worked as an assistant and secretary to the manager of Arvin Federal Camp, a domestic refugee camp its residents called the Weedpatch Camp. Her sister Dorothy also visited the camp, taking photographs as Sanora took notes. Together, they published illustrated essays about the displaced farmers in national magazines.

But the migrants were not just a fertile subject for art or a cause worth championing to Babb. Sanora would use her notes, Dorothy's photographs, and her memories of their own destitute childhood as material for a novel chronicling the lives of Dust Bowl migrants. She enthusiastically sent unsolicited drafts of her first chapters to Bennett Cerf, one of the founders of Random House. Cerf was so enthusiastic about her work that he offered her a contract for the book. However, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* would beat Babb to the punch.

Whose Names Are Unknown* and *The Grapes of Wrath

The Grapes of Wrath sold more than 400,000 copies in the first year, with *The New York Times* calling it "a magnificent novel of America." Cerf offered Babb a chance to publish a different book. But the novel, which she had titled *Whose Names Are Unknown*, was her masterpiece, though it would remain unpublished for many decades. In 2004, when *Whose Names Are Unknown* was finally published, the author began to attract the attention of literary critics, historians, and the public.

Whose Names Are Unknown and *The Grapes of Wrath* both take place, in part, in the Weedpatch Camp. The Joad family in Steinbeck's novel thinks the Weedpatch Camp is too good to be true when they arrive in the evening and are immediately assigned housing that has toilets and showers. In Babb's novel, Mrs. Starwood is less impressed, but she's grateful for the use of the camp water tower so that she can wash her children's quilts. Both books vividly depict the central problem in the camps: hunger. It's the reason the Joads eventually leave the camp in Steinbeck's novel.

In *Whose Names Are Unknown*, characters are never purely good or bad, and the circumstances are presented plainly without emotional appeal. Babb was a writer who understood that problems are typically systemic—not attached to one action alone.

Babb's novel lingers far longer on the domestic life of the farmers before they leave their barren farmland than *The Grapes of Wrath* does, which allows for compelling descriptions of life in the Oklahoma panhandle that were heavily based on her own childhood. Babb's prose in these sections has a quiet intimacy, and she centers her work on portrayals of strong, independent women.

Making the world right when it's busted was more Babb's concern than Steinbeck's. While the disenfranchisement of farm workers was Babb's chief political and intellectual subject and poverty and migration the themes of her early life that continued to influence her work, Steinbeck quickly moved on to other subjects.

Cannery Row

Three years after *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck published *The Moon Is Down*, a novel based on the occupation of Norway by the Germans in World War II. Three years after that, in 1945, he published *Cannery Row*, a comic novel set in Monterey, California, about the hijinks of a group of oddball drunkards.

In writing *Cannery Row*, Steinbeck turned to his friend Ed Ricketts, a marine biologist who became the character Doc in the novel. Ricketts had a laboratory at 800 Cannery Row that supplied marine samples to labs and museums all over the world.

Cannery Row is the actual name of the street today, but when Steinbeck was writing about it, that was just a nickname. Its official name was Ocean View Avenue. The nickname emerged because the avenue was lined with the sardine canneries that made up a large part of the Monterey Bay

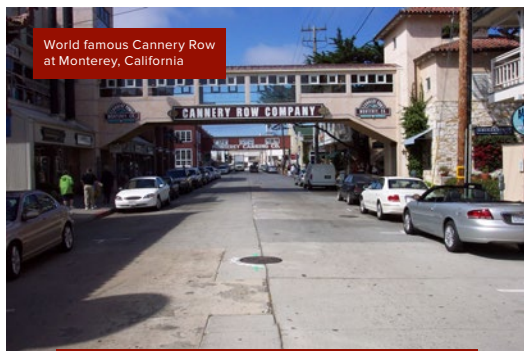
fishing industry. But the overfishing that Doc Ricketts noted led the fisheries down a similar path as the farms of the Dust Bowl—greed and ignorance creating scarcity and suffering.

The environmental collapse of the fishing industry left those reliant on it for work in dire straits. The Cannery

Row Steinbeck depicts is a place where those without homes congregate, lined with flophouses and brothels. The novel is a portrait of a neighborhood, and like any endeavor that makes one stop and really get to know the folks in a community, it emerges as a sympathetic one.

The city of Monterey also maintains three shacks unchanged from the time they were used as cannery worker housing. They're dedicated to the three ethnic groups that provided most of the labor to Central Californian fisheries: the Spanish, the Filipinos, and the Japanese.

Steinbeck grew up in Salinas, about 20 miles northeast of Monterey. One can visit Steinbeck's birthplace and childhood house in the city, and it is also home to the National Steinbeck Center, a world-class museum honoring the life and legacy of the author.



Carmel-by-the-Sea

Only 15 minutes away from Salinas is another coastal town with some pretty significant literary historical cred. Carmel-by-the-Sea is a community that has long attracted appreciators of natural beauty, and looking at it now, it's easy to see why it's become one of the most desirable communities on the California coast. Today, that desirability comes with a high price tag. But one of the key reasons why Carmel-by-the-Sea became a draw to artists and writers in the early 20th century is that it offered cheap living. Rents were low, one could

even sleep on the beach, and Chinese and Japanese grocers sold beans and vegetables at a low cost, which made a delicious meal alongside the bountiful fish and shellfish provided by the sheltered bay.

The novelist and journalist Jack London spent time in Carmel-by-the-Sea after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and quickly became friends with another temporary resident: Upton Sinclair, who'd become famous for his 1906 novel *The Jungle*.

London documented the low cost and high quality of life for writers there in his 1913 novel *The Valley of the Moon*, along with the sheer magnificence of the setting:

Carmel Bay came upon them without any fore-glimmerings of its beauty. Dropping down through the pungent pines, they passed woods-embowered cottages, quaint and rustic, of artists and writers, and went on across wind-blown rolling sandhills held to place by sturdy lupine and nodding with pale California poppies.

Saxon screamed in sudden wonder of delight, then caught her breath and gazed at the amazing peacock-blue of a breaker, shot through with golden sunlight, overfalling in a mile-long sweep and thundering into white ruin of foam on a crescent beach of sand scarcely less white. ... They turned south.

Everywhere from among the pines peeped the quaint pretty houses of the artist folk, and they were not prepared, where the road dipped to Carmel River, for the building that met their eyes.

"I know what it is," Saxon almost whispered. "It's an old Spanish Mission. It's the Carmel Mission, of course. That's the way the Spaniards came up from Mexico, building missions as they came and converting the Indians."

Dating from the 18th century, the mission is one of the most intact authentic Catholic mission churches in California. Visitors to Carmel-by-the-Sea typically come to see the mission and the city's quaint fairy-tale houses—stone and stucco cottages that look as if a witch or gnome might emerge from the curved front doors at any moment to beckon one in.

One of these houses belonged to human rights activist, poet, playwright, and novelist Mary Austin, who moved to Carmel in 1906 after living in the Mojave Desert for many years and writing about the Native peoples there. Austin's best-known work, *The Land of Little Rain*, describes the landscape and cultures of the Mojave Desert. Through deft and subtle writing, the book argues that cultures thrive when human beings live in harmony with nature—rather than putting themselves at odds with it by trying to control and harness it. Therefore, it is a work that offers the same lessons as the history of the Dust Bowl and the sardine fisheries of the central California coast.

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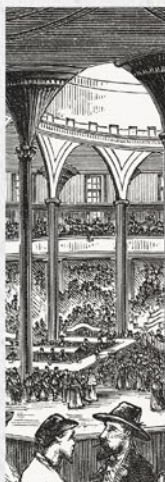
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20

Dreams and Illusions in Hollywood



Hopeful actors, makeup artists, set painters, script girls, and best boys—it seems like almost everyone who flocks to Hollywood has dreams or intentions of being in “the business,” as the movie industry has been called in this town for more than 100 years. Of course, movies wouldn’t wind up on the screen without writers. And as you’ll see in this lecture, Hollywood has been home not only to the screenwriters and novelists whose works get made into movies but also to those who were born there and sense strange and surreal material for their art in their natural habitat.



The Illusion of Hollywood and the Garden of Allah

Hollywood has long inspired writers interested in exploring the line between reality and illusion. In the beginning of her novel *Slow Days, Fast Company*, Eve Babitz—a Hollywood writer of the 1960s—would write about Los Angeles as a place where the slow, drug-infused days bleed into the fast company of shallow, unknowable people one only sees at parties. In the novel, Babitz carves out this insight: The movies are an illusory world made of real sets and actors, but Hollywood is a real world made of illusions. Maybe it's just the drugs, but Babitz and others saw in those illusions an opportunity to invent a life out of art.

One of the quintessential novelists of Hollywood during the golden age of cinema was Nathanael West. In West's *The Day of the Locust*, the drug of choice is alcohol. The protagonist, Tod Hackett, is a frustrated artist who tries to survive the Great Depression by becoming a set painter in Hollywood. The other characters he meets are sad stereotypes, like the aspiring actress Faye Greener, who is willing to do anything to get a role. Desperate for the validation of fame or love, Faye is a dreamer—a longer for greener pastures whose refusal to see the emptiness of her own desires rots her soul.

Most critics have seen *The Day of the Locust* as an indictment of the commercial capitalist culture of the film industry, where people are conditioned to long for lives made of passively consumed illusions. They never feel alive unless they're watching or performing—the complex variety of human interaction reduced to audience and actor. Sequences read like dreams rather than probable scenarios, and the significant humor of the novel is to be found in how bizarre the reality of Hollywood actually is.

In 1918, a Jewish American silent film star who couldn't buy property in Beverly Hills because of anti-Semitism, leased—and then later purchased—a long-abandoned estate in West Hollywood. The star, Alla Nazimova, installed a pool shaped like the Black Sea and made other eccentric renovations. Her lavish parties were notorious, and when Nazimova nearly

went bankrupt, she turned her house into a hotel. The guest register at the Garden of Allah Hotel read like a who's who of Depression-era culture, with stars, musicians, and writers all living in the hotel in the 1930s.

Nathanael West's buddy F. Scott Fitzgerald paid an exorbitant \$400 a month for his poolside cottage, where he attempted—unsuccessfully—to write screenplays for MGM and started his unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon*.

The Last Tycoon tells the story of Monroe Stahr, a thinly fictionalized version of the Hollywood film producer Irving Thalberg—the production director of MGM known as the boy wonder for his remarkably early career success. Thalberg and his wife, the actress Norma Shearer, threw parties in their Santa Monica mansion along Ocean Front that Fitzgerald attended—the preferred location for the stars in Hollywood before the shift to Malibu in the second half of the 20th century. The area was then known as the Gold Coast.

Eve Babitz and Joan Didion

Eve Babitz has often been compared to Nathanael West as a writer, preoccupied as they both were with characters whose morals are as changing as their desires. Though she can play the critic, Babitz's portraits of Los Angeles are always tender. She loved the place, considered herself of it, and resented writers who she felt sold it out to advance their own messages about youth, consumer culture, media, or whatever else it was popular to criticize. She pays attention to both the beauty and the cruelty of Hollywood without passing any judgment.



While Babitz would eventually gain renown as a writer, she was an artist and, perhaps first, an art scenester. In 1967, she caught the attention of art dealer and record executive Earl McGrath. McGrath sometimes hung out at a house on Franklin Avenue owned by two young writers: John Gregory Dunne and Joan Didion. The members of the band The Mamas & the Papas were almost always present. Janis Joplin might drop by. By the end of 1967, Eve Babitz was a fixture at the house and close friends with Didion. Didion was also born in California but further north, and inland, in Sacramento. She wrote about Sacramento in many of her works, including her first novel, *Run River*, and her nonfiction works *The White Album* and *Where I Was From*.

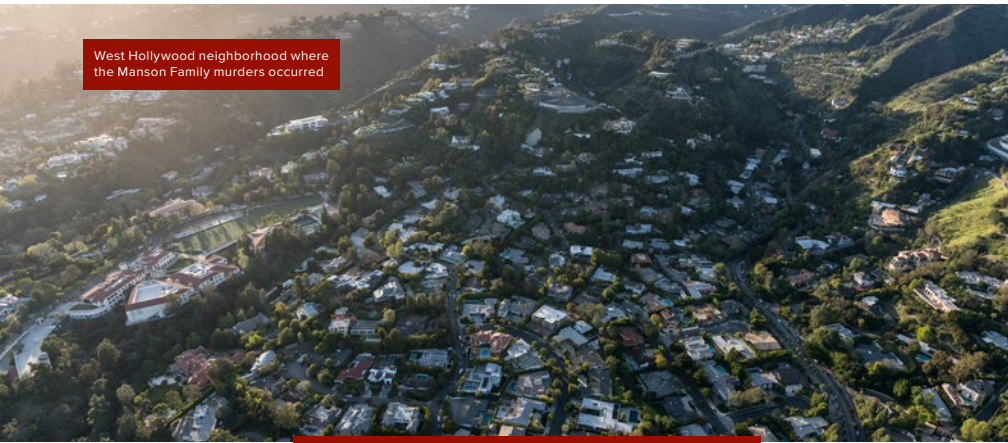
But Didion is most famous for her writing about Los Angeles, specifically the three books she wrote while living in the Franklin Avenue house: *The White Album*, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, and *Play It as It Lays*. In a sense, both Babitz and Didion were, like Nathanael West, trying to understand what California was all about. Though they were Californians, they inhabited different Californias—even when they were briefly together in Hollywood.

Didion was from what Babitz considered cowboy California—the Old West with a capital W. She grew up on Hemingway, whom she often cited as a favorite writer, and her prose is deeply interested in environment and landscape. In contrast, Babitz was born in Hollywood. She was a writer of people and their interactions—an observer of their most intimate gestures and expressions. It is as if Babitz writes in close-up, while Didion prefers the wide shot. Their intense friendship and stylistic differences undoubtedly made both women better and more successful writers.

Didion and her husband, Dunne, would help Babitz land her first *Rolling Stone* piece and then go on to edit *Eve's Hollywood*, the book that put Babitz on the map as a writer. However, the closeness between Didion and Babitz, and the scene itself, would come to an end with the arrival of the 1970s.

Didion pinpointed the moment of that ending at the murders committed by the Manson Family cult in Benedict Canyon, a neighborhood west of Hollywood. Eve Babitz, unsurprisingly, knew many of the Manson family members personally. Didion would interview the murderers as a journalist and see in their twisted ideology ghosts of the social greed and degradation she had tracked in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*.

Didion and her family moved to a beach house in Malibu shortly after the Manson conviction. But Babitz would remain in Hollywood, forever a feature of the scene. It was not for her to exert moral judgment. She took things as they came.



West Hollywood neighborhood where the Manson Family murders occurred

What Happened Next?

The stories of what happened to Eve and Joan are as much stories about New York and Los Angeles as they are about writers and women in a certain historical period. In 1988, Didion would move back to the Upper East Side of Manhattan, a place she fell in love with when she worked in the copy department for *Vogue* magazine in her twenties.

In New York, Didion was able to cultivate the connections she had in book publishing and the magazine world. She became one of the most significant writers of the New Journalism movement and wrote more seriously about politics. In 2005, her memoir about her husband's death, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, won the National Book Award. In 2012, she was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Obama.

After Didion left Hollywood, Babitz kept doing her thing. She continued to be the voice of the scene as it changed and evolved—ever present, ever witty, ever exerting fierce opinions but never judgment. By the end of the 1980s,

she was sober and the author of five books. Her sixth—a collection of essays called *Black Swans*—came out in 1993. Then, in 1997, she tried to light a cherry-flavored cigar while driving but instead lit up her acrylic skirt, which burst into flames. The accident more or less ruined her life. She had third-degree burns over half of her body and no money or insurance for the medical bills. Everyone left over from the 1960s pitched in to help her with an auction of donated art.

Babitz healed and retired to a small apartment crammed with mementos. Then, in the 2010s, a group of millennial writers began to resuscitate interest in her work. New editions of her books were released, film rights were sold, and she suddenly made more off her writing in her seventies than she had in her entire life.

Babitz's appeal lies in the fact that—while other writers woke up from their California dreaming with a burning desire to tell everyone it was all a lie—she was content to accept the dream as a part of the experience. She never saw her hometown as a sham or a trap and never felt the bad was the price of the good, as West and Didion warned their readers. Perhaps the best way to understand the contradictions of literary Hollywood is to go there for yourself and find what each of these writers did: a place of their own imaginations made real.

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21

From Gold to Silicon in Northern California



The population of San Francisco in 1850 was around 35,000. Fifty years later, it was 350,000. The reason for this massive growth was the discovery of gold in 1948 near Coloma. The next half of the century would alter Northern California more than any 50-year period in its long history and would come to be known as the Gold Rush. In this lecture, you'll see how most of the period's fiction and the depiction of mining boom towns in film and television characterize Gold Rush—era Northern California as a place of economic growth and opportunity—a perception of the region that persists for many reasons today.



McTeague

Frank Norris's 1899 novel *McTeague*, about San Francisco's transformation due to the influx of immigrants in the wake of the Gold Rush, depicts a new world of things to buy and people desperate to buy them—the dawning of the era of consumerism on a population new to the wealth of the New World.

Norris grew up in a large house on Sacramento Street in San Francisco. His father was a jeweler who went into the real estate business, building cheap housing for exactly the immigrant populations that Norris would write of with concern in his xenophobic fiction.



Frank Norris

The protagonist of Norris's novel is an Irish dentist named McTeague who embodies some of the worst of the period's stereotypes about Irish Americans. The boorish dentist grows increasingly money crazed after his fiancée wins the lottery. Finding her stingy, he eventually murders her and runs away to Death Valley in search of more gold. The novel was adapted into a popular silent film in 1924—the film's title is a clear summation of Norris's central theme: greed.

Norris got the idea for the novel while reading of the death of Sarah Collins in the newspapers. Collins was an Irish immigrant living in San Francisco. In 1893, her husband stabbed her to death in the childcare center where she

worked as a janitor after she refused to give him any more money. Norris saw the murder as emblematic of immigrant greed and violence—a force he worried would ruin the country—and he wrote the novel in response to it.

His depictions of Irish, Jewish, German, and Mexican immigrants are grotesque—evidence of much of the bigotry these groups faced in California during the novel’s time period. Sadly, this feature may have helped to make the novel a success, as movements like eugenics and nativism were gaining momentum. With *McTeague*, Norris became a celebrity and popularized a new form of literature.

Edith Maude Eaton as Sui Sin Far

McTeague may remain the most famous 19th-century novel about San Francisco, but while Norris was writing about the city’s newly arrived populations from a highly prejudiced perspective, other writers were telling their own stories of immigration and adaptation to new lives in Northern California.

One such writer was Edith Maude Eaton. In 1897, Eaton was a respected and relatively well-known journalist who covered Chinese American issues. Such work was crucial, as Chinese immigrants faced severe discrimination from the time of their arrival in the 1850s.

The first Chinese immigrants to arrive to San Francisco were agricultural workers from Southern China. Mostly men came at first, looking to bring their families into better economic circumstances. They sought work as farmhands, gardeners, and domestic servants. In the 1860s, a new influx of Chinese workers arrived to labor on the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad.

Despite the fact that Chinese labor played such a crucial role in the development of California’s economy, Chinese workers faced vicious prejudice from White workers, who felt they were taking too many jobs. It was during this period of extreme anti-Asian prejudice and violence that Edith Maude Eaton began writing as Sui Sin Far. She wrote with a purpose: to raise awareness of and argue against anti-Asian racism in the United States.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Eaton was living in San Francisco and publishing stories set in its Chinatown in California. Her San Francisco stories raise issues that impacted members of the Chinatown community. Despite the seriousness of many of her themes, Sui Sin Far was seen as an entertaining and popular writer of stories for old and young. Asian culture was a subject of great fascination for Americans, who became insatiable for Chinese stories, art, and cuisine despite the prejudices they held against Chinese people. Eaton's realistic descriptions offered them the taste of Chinese American life they sought, served with a side of criticism of the anti-Asian laws and customs of the United States.



Sui Sin Far's best-known work, a collection of stories called *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, is set in the Chinatowns of San Francisco and Seattle—two locations many residents would travel between to visit family and friends.

Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan

Literary scholar and Berkeley Professor Elaine Kim has referred to most of the popular Chinese American writers of the 1940s and 1950s as “ambassadors of goodwill”—authors who attempted to explain the exoticism of Chinese culture to White readers without, like Eaton, drawing their attention to the injustices of anti-Asian racism.

These writers were understandably less popular with Asian American readers. But landmark publications like Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* in 1976 and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* in 1989 brought new kinds of psychological realism, stronger veins of protest, and a far broader readership to Asian American writing.

Kingston's first book, *The Woman Warrior*, weaves Chinese oral folk tales, passed down to Kingston by her mother, with contemporary stories drawn from her own life. Some of the stories are set in China, others in places like the San Francisco Airport and the towns of the Central Valley. The book was seen as revolutionary not only for its feminist perspective and representation of Chinese American life—unique in the literature of the 1970s—but also because Kingston sought to create a unique prose style that captures the rhythms and nuances of Chinese speech within English-language writing.

Like *The Woman Warrior*, Amy Tan's first novel is memorably divided between strong female narrators from two generations. The first generation are all recent immigrants to the United States from China. The second generation, their daughters, are Chinese Americans born in the United States.

As girls, the second generation struggled to understand their parents' ways and expectations. They felt caught as translators of the American world for their parents—a world they see so differently. In their adult lives, while navigating tumultuous



parent-child relationships and facing personal conflicts, the daughters learn more about their mothers' pasts in China and the courage that eventually brought them to the United States.

Silicon Valley

San Francisco is known for its cultural centers and bookstores. The City Lights Bookstore in Chinatown, cofounded by Lawrence Ferlinghetti in 1953, is San Francisco's most popular literary history site. The famous bookstore was the West Coast home of the Beat poetry scene. Jack Kerouac Alley runs by the shop between Chinatown and North Beach. A visitor can walk the alley to see murals and engraved writings from Kerouac, Maya Angelou, John Steinbeck, and other American literary luminaries.

The gritty arts scene that these writers would have encountered in the city in the mid-20th century is hard to find now, thanks to another kind of gold rush. The crowd at City Lights browse wearing AirPods, and the arts on display at the American Bookbinders Museum on Clementina Street have been all but replaced by e-readers and laptops. The tech industry has forever altered Northern California once again.

Kathy Wang's 2018 novel *Family Trust* is set in present-day Silicon Valley and tells the story of how one immigrant family fared through the most recent boom. Though Wang's novel is written in the third person, it also incorporates the points of view of many different characters to highlight the difficulty of intercultural—and intergenerational—communication.

The book begins when the Huang family patriarch, Stanley, learns he is dying of cancer. While Stanley comes to grips with his mortality, his two children, his ex-wife, and his current, much younger wife must try to get to know the distant workaholic before it's too late. They're also clamoring for a piece of his fortune: Stanley's son is stuck in middle management, and his daughter works on the moonshot program for a multinational tech company called X Corp, which owns the largest search engine in the world.

Over the course of the novel, the parents become more attuned to the complicated lives of the children, who have come into the tech boom a bit too late, and the children to the difficulties their parents faced as immigrants when the boom was just getting started. The matriarch, Linda, was an early employee at IBM, which established a West Coast lab in San Jose in 1952.

As the Huangs learn more about one another, important questions arise about the meaning of success within different cultural paradigms. The concept of luck—so central to traditional Chinese culture—is reexamined in the context of an American capitalism rife with greed and overconsumption.

The book's tagline is that "some of us are more equal than others," and its darkest truth is that money is often the only way to escape discrimination in the United States. The Huangs see assimilation and success as a triangulation of what they buy, where they live, and whom they marry. They are not likable characters per se, but they don't need to be. *Family Trust* is a compelling read about that most American of themes: what it means to make it big.

It's a far cry from the kinds of Chinese American lives documented in the mid-century fiction of Maxine Hong Kingston, whose valley was worked by the hands of farmers using the methods they'd brought from China. Working class kids growing up in San Francisco today, like Amy Tan in the 1960s, struggle even more within a city that's experienced such a precipitous rise in real estate values following the tech boom.

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22

Among the Trees in the Pacific Northwest



In this lecture, you'll keep moving north and shift your focus from gold to wood as you learn about the literature of the Pacific Northwest. In travelling through Oregon and into Washington, you'll take in vast national forests, the importance of the land to Native American culture, the counterculture visions of Ken Kasey that envisaged systems threshing and clearing everything in their path—resulting in both environmental and human destruction—and the devastating history of isolation and eventual mass incarceration that would be enacted upon Japanese Americans.



Romanticizing the Pacific Northwest

Cheryl Strayed's 2012 memoir *Wild* is an account of her hike of Pacific Crest Trail—a 2,650-mile-long walking path winding through 26 national forests and 7 national parks—that weaves lush descriptions of the landscape into a story of how Strayed overcame the grief of her mother's death and a recent divorce. The changing landscape reflects her changing mind and distance from the events that inspired her to hit the trail in the first place. She writes:

California had altered my vision, but Oregon shifted it again, drew it closer in. I hiked through forests of novel, grand, and Douglas fir, pushing past bushy lakes through grasses and weedy thistles that sometimes obscured the trail. I crossed into the Rogue River National Forest and walked beneath tremendous ancient trees before emerging into clear-cuts like those I'd seen a few weeks before, vast open spaces of stumps and tree roots that had been exposed by the logging of the dense forest.

The deforested clear-cuts become a metaphor for the process Strayed undergoes—her acceptance of loss as inevitable. She progresses from the Mojave Desert in California to Washington State and ends her hike at the Bridge of the Gods, a dramatic steel truss bridge that crosses the Columbia River between Oregon and Washington.

The Bridge of the Gods: A Romance of Indian Oregon is the title of an 1890 novel by Frederic Homer Balch, one of the first nationally published Pacific Northwest fiction writers and one of the first Anglo-American authors to feature Native Americans as major characters. The story is about a young minister who goes west to convert Indians to Christianity but finds himself conflicted when he falls in love with the half-Native, half-Asian daughter of a chief.

Balch's novel includes many mostly accurate details about the practices and locations of various regional tribes. He writes of the

“Canoe Indians” of the Sound and of the Oregon sea coast ... the hardy Indians of the Willamette Valley and the Cascade Range ... the bold, predatory riders of eastern Oregon and Washington ... the Okanogans, who disposed of their dead by tying them upright to a tree; the Yakimas, who buried them under cairns of stone. ... Over sixty or seventy petty tribes stretch the wild empire, welded together by the pressure of common foes.

Ken Kesey and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

In 2021, the Oregon-based organization Friends of Trees planted 30 new trees in a pretty special spot: the Kesey family farm just outside of Eugene, Oregon. The farm is a 15-minute drive from the city of Eugene, home to the University of Oregon, where author and countercultural icon Ken Kesey went to school and then eventually taught students as a professor of creative writing.

By his own definition, Kesey was “too young to be a beatnik, and too old to be a hippie,” but he would serve as a spiritual guide to the countercultural youth of the 1960s, bringing a shift in perspective to American culture and the literature of the West. It was a shift occasioned by a chance encounter with what he believed to be a life-changing substance.

While a graduate student at Stanford, Kesey was a paid volunteer at the Menlo Park Veterans Hospital for an FBI-funded study on how LSD impacted human psychology. Convinced



the drugs he'd been given in the study had opened his mind to reality like nothing he'd experienced before, he wanted to share their message with the world.

The novel he finished writing after the study—*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*—was inspired by his talks with inpatients at the hospital, conversations that often took place while Kesey was experiencing an acid trip. In these LSD-enhanced visits, Kesey concluded that many people mainstream society has deemed insane merely have ideas about the world that clash with dominant narratives.

The novel's narrator, Chief Bromden, is Chinook, a member of the people who lived along the Columbia River in Oregon. When settlers built a dam that destroyed his family's livelihood, Bromden's father lost his tribal status and died a depressed man, suffering from alcoholism. The son tried to assimilate into White society but had a mental breakdown while serving in World War II. When the story begins, he's been living in a psychiatric ward for 20 years. When the story ends, he's euthanized the protagonist—McMurphy—and escaped from the hospital.

One of Bromden's refrains deals with his relationship to what he calls the Combine, which is basically the machine of popular culture, a system that subordinates everyday people to corporate interest. But his metaphor—that of a machine that threshes and clears the earth of everything in its path—speaks to his Chinook perspective as well.

Exhausting Human and Natural Resources

The connection between environmental destruction and human spiritual degradation fascinated Kesey, whose follow-up novel—*Sometimes a Great Notion*—describes how the vast logging industry not only clears the forest but also subsequently threshes and reaps the lives of its laborers.

The novel focuses on the Stampers, a logging family living in the town of Wakonda on the Oregon coast. The patriarch, Henry, and his son Hank refuse to join a union strike against a local lumber company. Their protest takes the form of continued logging. The novel raises questions about family, labor, and what people's relationship to natural resources ought to be. Reading it, one can see how the trees of the Pacific Northwest are like the bison of the Great Plains—a natural resource that once sustained communities, eliminated in a matter of years by rapacious new settlers.

But the trees were not felled by White loggers alone. Like the mining industry of Northern California, the logging industries in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho required more labor than early settlers could provide, creating yet another influx of newcomers to what had previously been a very thinly settled region.

In the early 20th century, lumber companies in the Pacific Northwest used employment agents based in large immigrant cities like Chicago and New York to bring in more laborers desperate enough to work for low pay in poor conditions. These agents promised a guaranteed job to immigrants who had often exhausted all their resources in getting to the United States. An immigrant group that gained a reputation for loyalty and hard work without complaint were the Japanese. Alongside the newly arrived Scandinavians, they became the most sought-after immigrant workers.

Japanese Americans' Isolation and Internment

Japanese Americans also labored on their own farms in the region, and men who arrived first were often later joined by picture brides—women with whom they'd only exchanged letters that came to live with them as their wives. Like other wives of pioneer farmers, many of these women recounted their own experience as one of disappointment. They found their new husbands to be older than they'd expected and their new lives to be full of hard work and few comforts.

One such woman was the tanka poet Teiko Tomita, who wrote under the penname Yukari. In her poems, one can see the struggle she and those in her situation faced to accustom themselves to a way of life completely different from the one they had left behind. Yukari's poetry highlights the isolation of the new environment, but it also chronicles how her strong connection to the culture of her birth gives her hope, which is symbolized by the budding of her cherry trees in a foreign land where they are still able to flourish. To the Japanese, cherry trees symbolize not only Japan but also the Japanese people.



A great place to learn about this history is the Japanese American Museum of Oregon, located in Portland's Old Town. The most significant permanent gallery is devoted to the darkest chapter in Japanese American history: their internment during World War II.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor set off a chain of events that led to such intense suspicion of potential Japanese espionage that any and all Japanese Americans were incarcerated. From 1942 to 1946, the majority of Japanese Americans in the cities of the Pacific Northwest were interned in Idaho at a camp called Minidoka Relocation Center. Those who lived in more remote areas were held at Tule Lake in California and later relocated to the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming.

Yukari kept writing about her experiences throughout her internment, still using traditional Japanese poetic forms. Afterwards, she used poetry to process the immense challenge of rebuilding their lives. And some of the best writers of Japanese American literature from this region would also process this devastating history through poetry and fiction.

John Okada's 1957 novel *No-No Boy* is set after the internment period and portrays the life of Ichiro Yamada, a young Seattle man who struggles to find his place in a city that has rapidly changed in his enforced absence. Ichiro is caught between feeling disloyal to both American and Japanese culture.

W. Todd Kaneko's *This Is How the Bone Sings* is a 2020 collection of poetry about the history and legacy of the Minidoka Relocation Center. In his poem "Minidoka Was a Concentration Camp in Idaho," he writes that when he tries to say the name Minidoka to his young son, "My ancestors lay / fingers across my lips."

This history is no longer a hidden one. Works of literature about Japanese internment are now widely taught in schools, and interpretive sites exist at the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming, the Topaz Relocation Center in Utah, and the Manzanar War Relocation Center in California.

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23

Adventures in Alaska and Hawai'i



Alaska and Hawai'i, whose literature is the subject of this lecture, are the two youngest states in the union. They're also the two states with the highest Indigenous populations—a characteristic that informs their literature, which often deals with the conflicts between industry and nature, Indigenous and settler populations, and the strength of cultures that get formed in isolated places. In exploring this literature, you'll examine the connections to Alaska of authors such as John Muir, Jack London, and Velma Wallis and how Hawai'iian literature aims to encompass the traditions, geography, and culture of the place.



Uncharted Alaska

The Scottish American naturalist John Muir was almost as taken with Native Alaskan culture as he was with the beauty of the place. In 1915, his work *Travels in Alaska* was published, feeding into a national curiosity about a relatively unknown region of North America that wouldn't become a state until 1959. In it, he writes of the Inupiat of the Bering Sea.

In 1880 and 1881, Muir began his travels through southeast Alaska. He documented his findings in several newspaper articles, reports, and magazine articles that offered less intrepid readers an opportunity to travel vicariously through what was considered the last American frontier.

In “The Alaska Trip,” an 1897 piece in the popular *The Century Magazine*, Muir takes readers along with him as he leaves Puget Sound and travels through Juno, Glacier Bay, and Sitka. He then traverses the Cascade Mountains, passes the view of Mount Rainier, through Victoria, to Wrangell Island, commenting on the weather, flora, fauna, and people.

The reputation of Alaska as an uncharted wilderness has persisted in much of its literature, especially the literature written by men from elsewhere, who see going to Alaska as a test of their mettle—or just a chance to leave civilization behind. Much of this romance is based on the stories of the historical journey to the Yukon gold fields from Seattle. This route through Alaska was made especially famous by the popular novels and tales of Jack London, one of the first American writers to become an international celebrity.

Individualism versus Collectivism in Jack London's Alaska

London grew up in the Bay Area of San Francisco, and he was a literary naturalist, committed socialist, and White supremacist. His belief in the superiority of the White race fed his desire to steer young White men away from domestic life, which he thought weakened them. He wanted them to engage in physical labor, take risks, and pursue adventure.

His 1903 novel *The Call of the Wild* is about a pampered house dog named Buck who's captured in California and sold into service as an Alaskan sled dog. In Alaska, Buck is trained to be fierce in preparation for the arduous journey ahead. All the way to the Yukon, Buck becomes increasingly aggressive and wild, until the novel's end, where he joins the savage wolves, leaving a life of domestication completely behind. Buck's transformation is a certain kind of male fantasy transposed onto the canine world: The pampered house pet is finally given the chance to become a wolf.

London's well-known 1908 short story "To Build a Fire" likewise uses the savagery of dogs as either a model or criticism of a certain masculine ideal. It is meant to capture the every-man-for-himself (or every-dog-for-himself) ruggedness of survival but also implies that such attitudes might be deadly—that people might actually need one another to survive.



The binary between the compromises and safety of a collective society and the freedom and danger of rugged individualism is at the core of London's fiction. But it's not a theme one sees much in Native Alaskan literature, which is more often characterized by an awareness of the truth about survival in remote regions—that it's better achieved collectively. However, while living together might be necessary, it's not easy.

Velma Wallis

The Athabaskan writer Velma Wallis grew up with 12 siblings in a two-room cabin in a remote village near Fort Yukon, Alaska. The Arctic Circle runs through Fort Yukon, making it a far-flung tourist destination. It borders the

Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, a breathtakingly beautiful wetland area. But Fort Yukon is also a very difficult place to live. It's more than 100 miles to the closest city, Fairbanks, which is only accessible by plane or—in the summer—boat. In winter, the daylight can be as short as 3 hours.

When Velma Wallis's father died young, she helped her mother with the business of survival and raising the younger children. During her teenage years, she chose to live alone in a secluded hunting cabin, eating what she hunted and foraged. She brought the knowledge of these two experiences to the composition of her first novel, 1993's *Two Old Women*, which interprets one of the most well-known Alaskan Native legends.

The novel is set during the time when Wallis's ancestors were nomadic, following better weather and hunting conditions where they led them. In the book, the tribe is struggling through a difficult winter and decides that the burden of two quarrelsome old women is slowing them down too much. They leave the women behind to die for the good of the group.

The two women, who are 80 and 75, realize that if they want to live, they must stop fighting and work together to survive. So, they set to work laying traps, making fire, and protecting their bodies from the mosquitos at one of the tribe's fishing sites. They work well together using their traditional knowledge and have plenty stored away to eat by the time the hungry tribe returns expecting to find them dead. The tribe apologizes, and the women feed them. The lesson of the legend is typically interpreted as a warning never to underestimate anyone or leave anyone behind—the survival of all is necessary to the survival of each.



Wallis has compared the plot of *Two Old Women* to her own family history. She and her mother were left by her father's death, and together, they had to work to keep themselves and the younger children alive in a challenging climate. But she also notes how important a role storytelling itself played in their survival. When Wallis would ask her mother for advice or relate an unsolvable problem, her mother would answer indirectly through a story, allowing Wallis to learn through interpretation rather than prescription.

Native Hawai'ian Literature

The centrality of tale-telling is a feature of Native Hawai'ian tradition as well, demonstrating that Hawai'ians and Alaskans are two cultures with much in common. Both are unique Indigenous populations in the United States, ethnically and culturally distinct from Native Americans. There is also only one reservation in Alaska and none in Hawai'i, so their experience of colonization has taken a different shape. Many Indigenous citizens were never relocated and continue to live where their ancestors lived. Others have moved of their own volition.

Much of the contemporary literature of Hawai'i focuses on the racial and cultural tensions that continue to exist on the island between Native Hawai'ians and settlers, a conflict with its own unique dimensions.

Hi'i—the protagonist of Jasmin 'Iolani Hakes's 2023 novel *Hula*—comes from a family famous for hula. The Naupakas have always danced hula and always lived in Hilo. They are proud of their Native heritage and so are surprised when Hi'i is born as light as a White person. As Hi'i grows, her Native Hawai'ian identity is deeply ingrained within her through education in hula, an art form that is meant to portray Hawai'ian ideas about the world through dance.

This issue of Native Hawai'ian ancestry became of interest to Hakes because she had long been told she was part Native Hawai'ian, though this racial designation does not appear on her birth certificate. Such a claim is not insignificant in Hawai'i, where fine racial distinctions are firmly encoded into law. So, Hakes's novel weaves a fascinating story around a highly contested issue on the present-day archipelago.

Hula performance at King Kalakaua's 49th Birthday Hula



To write the novel, Hakes consulted with Princeton University Professor J. Kēhaulani Kauanui. The professor's book *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* offers groundbreaking insights into how racial politics have informed Hawai'ian culture and law. She describes how, in the 1921 Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, the US Congress defined "Native Hawai'ian" as "any descendant of not less than one-half part of the blood of the races inhabiting the Hawai'ian Islands previous to 1778." The legal system in Hawai'i has subsequently always utilized this logic, known as the blood quantum, to determine who is or is not Native.

Such a situation might sound advantageous to Native Hawai'ians, but it's not. It effectively means that with each generation that intermarries, fewer—not more—people are legally considered Native Hawai'ian, further minoritizing their population.

Intergenerational Hawai'i

An interracial marriage is at the heart of Kiana Davenport's classic 1994 novel about Hawai'ian history and culture, *Shark Dialogues*, which is another intergenerational saga that takes place mostly in the 1990s on the largest Hawai'ian Island, commonly referred to as the Big Island or Hawai'i Island. At the novel's beginning, four sisters are summoned home to their

ancestral coffee plantation by their grandmother. Each granddaughter is mixed race; their different fathers represent dominant ethnic populations in 1990s Hawai'i (and today).

The intergenerational saga of this family began back when a runaway Tahitian princess and a young man from New England fell in love in Hawai'i. This story may be based in part on the real-life marriage of John Palmer Parker of Newton, Massachusetts, and Chiefess Kipikane, granddaughter of King Kamehameha I.

Kamehameha was the first ruler of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, which formed when he conquered all four islands and unified them under his rule.

The kingdom had diplomatic recognition from the countries of Europe and the United States until 1893, when Queen Lili'uokalani—who fought for the power of the throne to outweigh that of the legislature—was overthrown in a coup organized by a militia that called themselves the Committee of Safety, composed of 13 Americans and non-Native Hawai'ians who were successful businessmen with ties to the legislature.

Queen Lili'uokalani wrote her own autobiography, which is an undisputed classic of Hawai'ian literature that describes her upbringing and the political circumstances that defined her adult life in great detail. In addition to being an avid reader and writer, Lili'uokalani also composed popular folk songs, including “Aloha ‘Oe.”



Queen Lili'uokalani

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American Expatriate Writers



Perhaps places such as Alaska and Hawai'i have been so heavily contested because they are so naturally beautiful and rich in resources. Their literature is steeped in the themes of how racial tensions play out in people's relationships to land and culture. In this final lecture, you'll explore this theme more thoroughly and consider some expatriate American writers who looked back on the United States from the vantage point of their lives abroad. In doing so, you'll take a bird's-eye perspective of American literary and cultural history.



American Writers in France

Edith Wharton and Gertrude Stein, both seminal figures to their generation though they were born 12 years apart, were American women who lived in France as children only to return permanently as adults. They were both professional writers who held court at their French homes, welcoming famous guests and creating little aesthetic worlds of their own. But in many ways, Stein and Wharton could not have been more different, and their social boundaries reflect the differences in each writer's own literary style.



Stein's circle was the high modernists. Pablo Picasso was her muse and mentor, and Henri Matisse was her confidante. Her writer friends included Hemingway and Fitzgerald, both of whom also lived in the city for long periods. Like the painters she patronized, Stein is known for abstraction. A central principle of her philosophical approach to writing is that language already is the thing it names, not a representation of some other realer thing. This belief about language produced a distinct prose style that set the tone for the plainer writing of the generation of American writers who came after her, whom she first encountered in Paris.

In contrast, Wharton was committed to artistic and literary classical realism, the kind practiced by her painter friends Maxfield Parrish and Edward Darley Boit and great French novelists like Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert—

prose that's meant to convey deep meaning through rich description.

Stein and Wharton also occupied different parts of Paris. Stein was long based at an apartment in the sixth arrondissement, just west of the Luxembourg Gardens. Hemingway would walk through the gardens on the way to visit Stein from his apartment on rue du Cardinal Lemoine or the sixth-floor studio he used for writing on rue Descartes. Both of these buildings are marked by plaques today.

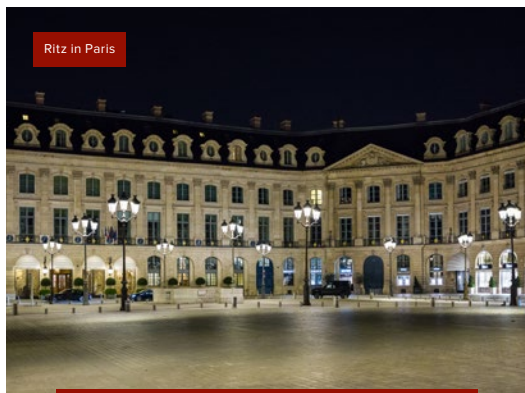
Wharton's Paris was less hip and less trafficked than Hemingway's and Stein's. Her home during World War I was at 53 rue de Varenne, a late-19th-century stone building that came with steam heat—a rarity in France. A plaque on the outside of the building describes her as “the first writer of the United States to settle in France out of love of the country and its literature.”

Wharton's Traditionalism

In her book on French culture, *French Ways and Their Meaning*, Wharton not so subtly compares the French to Americans at every turn, and the United States emerges from the comparison as a young nation with much to learn from her older peer—one that's been in business since the Middle Ages.

This work is not so different from that of a genre that would become popular later on in the 20th and 21st centuries, including works like Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence* and Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*, where Americans go abroad to learn how to live well and then write the folks back home about it.

Some of Wharton's most interesting reflections center on the differences between French and American women. She



complained that “compared with the women of France the average [American] woman is still in the kindergarten.” She goes on to suggest that the only encouraged function of American women is to assert their individuality through the manipulation of their environment. Conversely, French women are their husbands’ respected business partners and decision-makers and generally enjoy more equality in French society. Wharton understands heterosexual relations to be less hierarchical there because the work that women typically do is understood as an artistic practice.

Wharton was born into the strict, rule-bound society of 1860s and 1870s Manhattan, a place she found lacking in cultural charm. But she actually spent much of her childhood abroad—in Italy, Spain, Germany, and France. She looked down on New York when compared to Europe but still thought it superior to the rest of the United States. Given her early time abroad, Wharton was all too aware of how the pretenses of so-called Old New York society stood on historically—not to mention aesthetically—shaky ground. But she also had a respect for how her people stood that ground.

In the end, tradition was what Wharton saw as valuable above all else—a necessary consistency to form the bedrock of a national culture. Without tradition, there would be no cultures at all, but the very concept of a national tradition stands at odds with the history of the United States, defined as it was politically by a revolution and culturally by a coming together of many different global populations with different beliefs and practices.

Stein’s Modernity

Gertrude Stein’s *Paris France* was published in 1940 on the very same day Paris came under German occupation. Stein’s wartime politics are a subject of controversy among scholars, who still debate the extent of her allegiance to the Vichy government.

But it is clear she remained proud of her Americanness despite her expatriation. A part of this fondness for the nation of her birth was informed by her identity as a Californian. She saw the value in the lack of a coherent cultural tradition that Wharton could not.

Because the US has no singular, cemented tradition, it has at least two distinct advantages: The first is that the culture is very flexible, so it can adapt to reflect the ever-changing population. The second is that the culture is very heterogenous and therefore productive of new ideas that emerge through novel cultural intersections. In many ways, therefore, it's a country better adapted to the modern than the traditional.

It could be—and has been—argued that modern American literature was invented in Gertrude Stein's apartment in Paris. She called the writers who gathered there the Lost Generation—a group of wandering souls who'd come of age during the First World War. This group of young expats left America to try to create a new American literary tradition—a literature that captured their disenchanted outlook in both content and style.

Stein was particularly drawn to sculpture from the West and North Coasts of Africa. These regions were colonized by France in the late 19th century, and as a result, their art became a part of the Parisian cultural scene.

The influence of African sculpture is evident in Picasso's famous painting of Stein, which also represents the significance of the American literary movement in France. It's a portrait of a Californian author by a Spanish painter that employs aesthetic techniques pioneered by African sculptors. In a sense, this swirl of influences—Spain, Africa, California—is distinctly American in spirit, though it took place in France.



Picasso and Stein

James Baldwin

The cultural products that the world associates with America—jazz music, Cajun food, folk art, to name just a few—arise from the intersecting cultures uniquely found here. The United States has consistently held the highest immigration rate of any nation in the world since the 19th century. And it is a nation formed by its 400-year history of enslaving people from all over Africa.

The cultural history of America is inextricable from Southern American slavery—not only because the trade in human beings brought so many people from all over into contact with one another, especially in the American South, but also because the anti-Black racism that was invented to justify slavery came to be a central feature of American cultural products.

James Baldwin, who also spent much of his adult life in Paris in the 20th century, was the grandson of an enslaved person. He believed that White America relied on anti-Black racism to construct its own identity. As a gay Black man, he faced a double discrimination and saw that both prejudices were rooted in a conservative fear of love and sex—the ethos of a once-puritanical United States.



Baldwin and his friends were targeted as civil rights leaders, homosexuals, or communists. To focus on finishing his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, he left the country in 1948 and went to Paris—where he could be himself. In Paris, he would not only complete *Go Tell It on the Mountain* but also begin to think about the novel that would become *Giovanni's Room*. This book would be the first of his works to openly portray male homosexual relationships. It's also set in Paris.

At the height of the civil rights movement, Baldwin left his relatively trouble-free life to join in the political struggle African Americans were undertaking at home. He also felt the need to return to the US in the service of his art, documenting the nation that had shaped him as a writer and a man. The America he confronted was one locked in a turmoil he could not have imagined. President Kennedy would be assassinated in 1963, and the race movement was growing more and more divided.

The desolation Baldwin experienced in the United States was the loneliness of a nation of strangers who had been raised in a tradition of classifying some of the nation's citizens as less human than others. For Baldwin and later writers, the Lost Generation—for all of their insight—were therefore missing the central plot of the American cultural experience. Baldwin argued that since the truth those writers revealed was ultimately a false (or at least an incomplete) one, their time had passed.

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