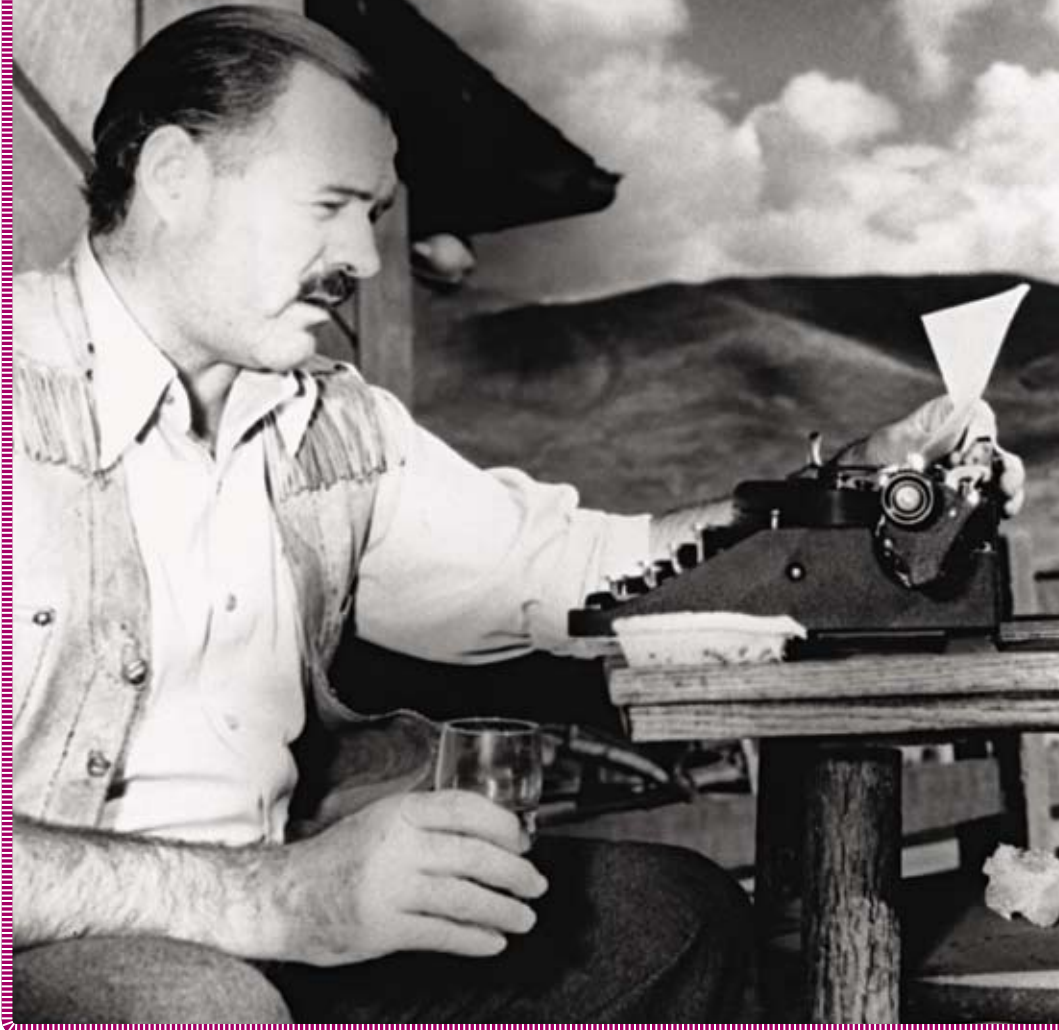


Given that history is in many ways the story of a nation and its people, what better way to look on American history than through its story-tellers.



Ernest Hemingway, who started out as a journalist, became a major American novelist. He drew inspiration from his travels in Europe and Africa.

AMERICAN LITERATURE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

THE BEGINNINGS

We could date modern America's origins back to the 1500s when Spanish and Portuguese explorers began landing in places that are now Florida or Texas. Later, English explorers started sending colonists further north to places like North Carolina and Virginia. In 1607, one of the first colonies, Jamestown, was founded. Its population **was booming**: In 1630, only about 3,000 people lived there, but in the next ten years, 16,000 more colonists arrived.

The colonists weren't the first people to live on this land. The Native Americans farmed and hunted all over the US long before them. While they didn't have much written work, their stories and beliefs **were handed down** generation by generation.

COLONISATION AND INDEPENDENCE

During the 1700s, the immigrant population expanded westwards, resulting in conflicts with Native Americans as the colonists were taking their land. James Fenimore Cooper (*The Last of the Mohicans*) is known for his books about Native Americans and the pioneers (they are set in this period although they were written in the following century). In 1732 Benjamin Franklin began producing *Poor Richard's Almanac*. **Almanacs** were popular for their weather forecasts, calendars, **household hints**, puzzles and games. Franklin's was especially popular because of his writing style, which included **proverbs** like "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise."

In the late 1700s the colonists started to **resent** British rule. Revolts began, like the Boston Tea Party in 1773, and **clashes** between British soldiers and colonists. On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence, written primarily by Thomas Jefferson, was adopted. The Revolutionary War, which ended

in America being declared an independent country, lasted from 1775-1783.

19TH CENTURY

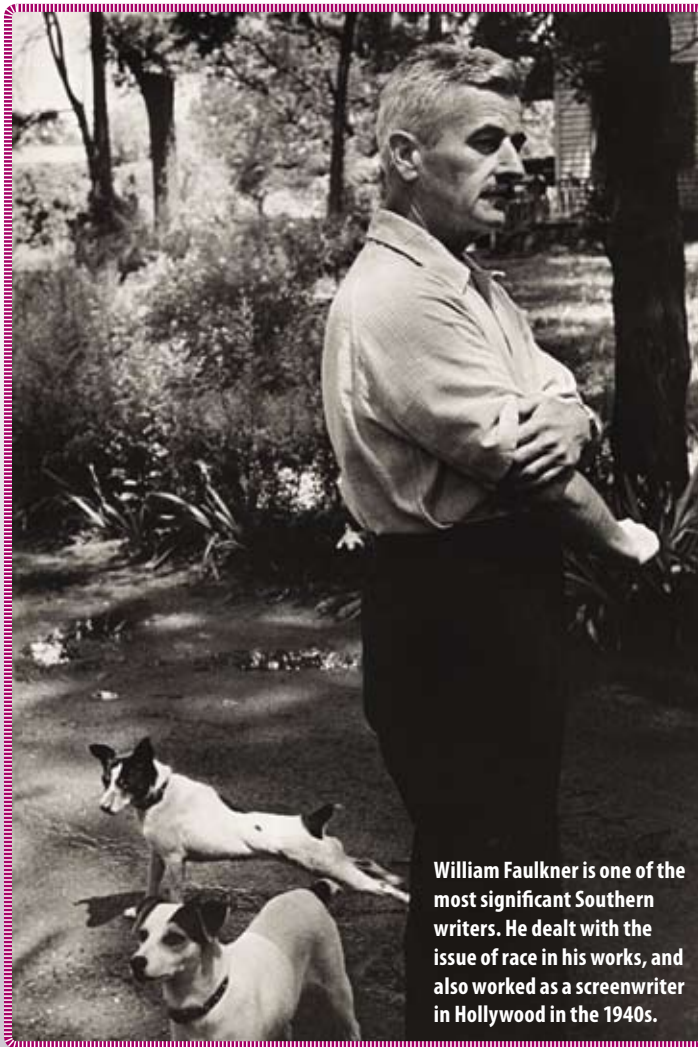
In the 1800s the country continued to expand westwards, with the historic Louisiana Purchase **doubling the amount of land** in America. The famous explorers Lewis and Clark made their expedition to the Pacific Ocean. In 1860s, the country went through the Civil War, ending with the **abolition** of slavery.

A variety of writers were busy during this period. Washington Irving wrote humorous short stories and folk tales about Dutch settlers like *Rip van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Edgar Allan Poe could be considered the father of horror and crime fiction thanks to stories like *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Herman Melville, on the other hand, used his real life experience as a sailor to write novels like *Moby Dick*, about an obsessive hunt for a white whale. Mark Twain, an entertaining writer, introduced Americans to what life was like along the Mississippi River with stories like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

A philosophical movement known as Transcendentalism also arose during this period. It was inspired by the works of the essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, who emphasized the individual and the natural world. His follower Henry David Thoreau was even more radical – he didn't believe in organized society and lived alone in a **cabin** for two years.

America's two greatest 19th-century poets were Walt Whitman, who used free verse and celebrated nature and human-self, and Emily Dickinson, who rarely left her home and wrote short poems about love, death and God.

In the beginning of the new century, Jack London became popular with his adventurous books, sometimes based on his



William Faulkner is one of the most significant Southern writers. He dealt with the issue of race in his works, and also worked as a screenwriter in Hollywood in the 1940s.

experiences from the Klondike gold rush (such as *White Fang*).

BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

With the arrival of the 20th century, the construction of the Panama Canal started and the US began to introduce many new laws, like ones dealing with child **labor** and regulation of the food industry. Many writers at the time were writing about social problems. In 1917, the US joined World War I in Europe. Two important laws were adopted in 1920: Prohibition, which meant alcohol was banned (until 1933), and women received the **right to vote**.

Books by Francis Scott Fitzgerald, like *The Great Gatsby*, were being read, which described people trying to follow the "American dream" to become wealthy and respected in society. William Faulkner wrote books about the American

South such as *The Sound and the Fury*, which examined how the past, especially the era of slavery, influenced the present. He often used long chaotic sentences to show the thoughts and feelings of his characters. The term "The Lost Generation" is used for authors influenced by World War I. Nobel Prize winner Ernest Hemingway served as a war correspondent in WWI and the Spanish Civil War and wrote novels and short stories about soldiers and other men of action. *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Old Man and the Sea* are some of his best-known. His **plain** writing style became so famous that it was frequently parodied.

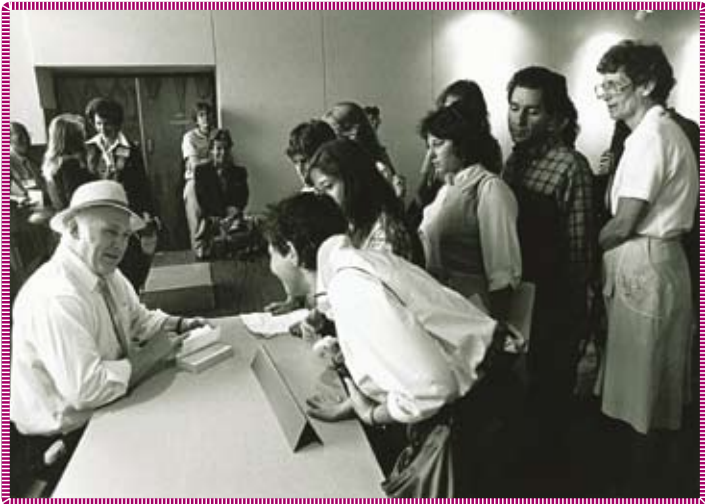
In the 1930s America was suffering from the Great Depression. One writer who **captured** this time period very well was John Steinbeck (*Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice And Men*). He often wrote about poor

working-class people and their **struggle to lead a decent** life during the Depression. President Roosevelt's New Deal plan created many new government institutions that gave Americans jobs and helped the economy.

In 1941, the US joined World War II when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. During this time, the life in the US changed dramatically. A lot of women began working outside the home because many men were off fighting in the war. The atomic bomb was brought to life, and the end of the war saw the beginning of the **nuclear arms race**. Some authors used their war experiences in their novels. Joseph Heller was a bombardier and used his experiences in his satirical novel *Catch-22*, a black comedy about military life. William Styron described the **devastating impact** of war in *Sophie's Choice*, a novel about a Polish woman who, while imprisoned in a concentration camp **was forced to make a cruel choice** – which of her two children would survive and which would be killed.

POST WWII PERIOD

Social changes continued through the '50s and '60s. Family life was important, so many people had children and **settled in the suburbs**. Writers however looked at it a bit differently. The 1950s gave birth to a literary movement known as the "Beat Generation". Authors **rejected** traditional society and looked for new experiences through drugs, jazz music and Eastern mysticism. Jack Kerouac celebrated the lifestyle in his book *On the Road*, describing his road trip across America. No one can forget the experimental '60s when drugs and rock and roll inspired a generation of youth. The Vietnam War and civil rights also played an important role in many people's lives. Vietnam continued to dominate the 1970s as did the Cold War and an **oil crisis**.



Ken Kesey (the author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) signs his books at Miami Bookfair International in 1984.

Ronald Reagan was president during much of the '80s. Many **credit him with** helping to end Communism in Europe.

J. D. Salinger made a name for himself with *The Catcher in the Rye*, a story of a troubled, sensitive teenager who runs away from his school. Norman Mailer wrote fiction (*An American Dream*) as well as books based on real events (*Of a Fire On the Moon*). Ken Kesey gained fame with his first book, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a story of a man who **pretends** to be mad **in order to** escape imprisonment and is shocked by the inhuman conditions in a mental hospital. It was made into an Oscar-winning movie directed by Miloš Forman. The novels of John Irving (such as *The World According to Garp*) are characterized by colorful **plots, eccentric** characters and humor. Toni Morrison (*Beloved*)

is an African American author exploring the themes of racism, child **abuse** and slavery.

There is also a strong tradition of literature written by Jewish immigrants (Isaac Bashevis Singer, Chaim Potok), exploring the conflicting relationship between modern society and the Jewish tradition.

The beginning of the '90s saw America involved in the Gulf War in the Middle East. It was an **unprecedented** time as the internet **came into widespread use**. Bill Clinton's presidency dominated the era. John Grisham, known for his legal novels like *The Firm*, became extremely wealthy in the '90s.

THE PRESENT

And now it's the 21st century. It started out badly for the US with the attacks in New York and Washington DC in September

Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain were masters of aphorisms – short clever sayings which are intended to express a general truth, often in a witty or humorous way. Look at a selection of their aphorisms. Do you agree with them?

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Failure to prepare is preparing to fail.

Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.

Eat to live, and not live to eat.

Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.

Fish and visitors stink after three days.

MARK TWAIN

A classic is something that everybody wants to have read and nobody has read.

Always tell the truth. That way, you don't have to remember what you said.

If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man.

An Englishman is a person who does things because they have been done before. An American is a person who does things because they haven't been done before. Be careful about reading health books. You may die of a misprint.



Mark Twain

2001. Writers kept writing though and new genres were created. Famous CEOs, like Jack Welch of General Electric, wrote books about their experiences. Anything about management or leadership was popular, like *Leadership* by the former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani. Fiction continued to be popular too, with authors like Dean Koontz, who wrote about scary **supernatural** stuff, or James Patterson, writer of

thrillers. Technology **took off** even quicker than in the '90s with goodies like iPods and PlayStations. On the political front, George W. Bush was president through most of this time and the US was involved in fighting in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2008 US history was made when the nation elected its first African-American president, Barack Obama.

**Jacy Meyer (USA),
Zuzana Pernicová (CR)**

VOCABULARY

to boom - prudce narůstat
were handed down - se předávaly
almanac ['ɔ:lmanæk] - almanach, ročenka
household hints - rady do domácnosti
proverb ['prɒvə:b] - přísloví
to resent sth [ri'zent] - cítit odpor vůči něčemu
clash [klæʃ] - střet
doubling the amount of land - kteým se zdvojnásobila rozloha území
abolition [æbə'li:(ə)n] - zrušení
cabin - chatka, bouda
labor ['leɪbə] - práce
right to vote - volební právo
plain [pleɪn] - jednoduchý
to capture ['kæptʃə] - zachytit

struggle to lead a decent ['strʌg(ə)l 'di:s(ə)nt] - úsilí vést slušný
nuclear arms race ['nju:kliə] - závod v jaderném zbrojení
devastating impact ['devəsteɪtɪŋ 'ɪmpækt] - ničivý dopad
was forced to make a cruel choice - byla donucena učinit krutou volbu
settled in the suburbs ['sɛlbə:bz] - usadili se na předměstích
to reject [ri'dʒekt] - odmítnat
oil crisis ['kraɪsɪs] - ropná krize
many credit him with ['kredit] - mnozí mu přičítají zásluhy na
to pretend [pri'tend] - předstírat
in order to - aby
plot - zápletká

eccentric [ɪk'sentrik] - výstřední
abuse [ə'bjʊ:s] - zneužívání
unprecedented [ʌn'presɪdntɪd] - převratný
came into widespread use ['waɪdspred] - se rozšířil do běžného užívání
supernatural - nadpřirozený
took off - byla na vzestupu

GLOSSARY

road trip - a journey via a car, bus or bike, often unplanned
CEO - chief executive officer (the person in the highest executive position in a company)
goody - an object which is desirable or gives pleasure

LANGUAGE POINT

The verb "**to see**" can be used when describing what happened at a certain time: *The beginning of the '90s saw America involved in the Gulf War.*

CULTURE POINTS

Louisiana Purchase was a huge territory bought from France in 1803; it extends from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada.

Inauguration is the ceremony when somebody is put into an official position. American presidents are always inaugurated on January 20.