Unit 13

SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE

Reinventing the South

Authors and Works

Featured in the Video:

William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* and *Absalom, Absalom!* (novels)

Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (essay) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (novel)

Discussed in This Unit:

John Crowe Ransom, "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," "Here Lies a Lady," "Philomela," "Piazza Piece," and "Janet Waking" (poems)

Katherine Anne Porter, "Flowering Judas" (short story)

Thomas Wolfe, "The Lost Boy" (short story)

Robert Penn Warren, "Bearded Oaks," "Audubon," "American Portrait: Old Style," "Acquaintance with Time in Early Autumn," "Mortal Limit," and "After the Dinner Party" (poems)

Richard Wright, "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (short story)

Eudora Welty, "Petrified Man" (short story)

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (play)

Flannery O'Connor, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" and "Good Country People" (short stories)

Overview Questions

■ How do Southern Renaissance writers portray American identity differently from writers from other regions? How do Southern Renaissance writers use race, class, and gender as part of identity? What roles do history, tradition, and heritage play in the work of these writers?

■ Many writers of the Southern Renaissance achieved popularity and/or critical acclaim during their lifetimes, but faded into obscurity for years before being "rescued" by later critics who recognized their achievements as among the greatest in American literature. What accounts for such a roller coaster of critical reception? What does the uneven critical reception of these writers tell us about American "literature" and what constitutes "greatness"? How do the different social and economic backgrounds of writers in the Southern Renaissance influence what and how they write?

■ What is "the South" for writers of the Southern Renaissance? How is "the South" both place and time, and how does it relate to "the North" and the United States more generally?

■ What stylistic and thematic interests do Southern Renaissance writers have in common? How do these writers attempt to connect the past and the future via style and theme?

■ How does the myth of the "Old South" appear to the writers of the Southern Renaissance? How do these writers portray the "New South"? In what ways do Southern Renaissance writers imagine or create a new "New South"?

Learning Objectives

After students have viewed the video, read the headnotes and literary selections in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, and explored related archival materials on the *American Passages* Web site, they should be able to

1. discuss and understand both why and how historical time (in the sense of past, present, and future) became such a dominant preoccupation for writers of the Southern Renaissance;

2. see and discuss the particular ways writers of the Southern Renaissance engaged various concepts around which southern society was organized, including gender, race, social and economic position, agrarian vs. urban ways of life, and tradition vs. innovation or "progress";
3. understand the thematic and stylistic innovations introduced and/or employed by writers of the Southern Renaissance and how these innovations relate to literary modernism and literary history more generally;
4. recognize the attempts of Southern Renaissance writers to *create* "the South" (or at least small pieces of it) as both a place and a constellation of values and experiences.

Instructor Overview

For many people in the United States, the first half of the twentieth century was a period of tremendous change in almost every facet of life. Breakthroughs in science—including Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, as well as the increasing influence of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution—challenged conventional views of both the world we live in and our place within it. In the social sciences, the increasingly popular ideas of Sigmund Freud became conceptual tools used by many to question the sexual and social restraints of a tradition-bound culture they saw as highly repressed. Meanwhile, technological advances began to create the vast array of consumer goods we take for granted today, including movies, automobiles, airplanes, radios, and myriad other items—all produced on a massive scale previously unknown in human history. The industry needed to produce all these goods helped accelerate yet another great shift in American life as people migrated in ever greater numbers from their traditional, rural homes—where agriculture was the main focus of life—to the ever-expanding urban, industrial centers, such as Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia. However, much of this migration was from the South to the booming cities of the North—notably Chicago and New York—a trend that began around the time of the Civil War and continued into the mid-twentieth century. The period marked the first time in American history that fewer people lived in rural than urban areas, and as the focus of American life moved to the cities, the *consumption* of mass-produced goods became every bit as important as their production.

Historians sometimes refer to the massive social and cultural transformations of the early twentieth century as distinctively "modern." For many—and especially for many writers during the period—such great change and social upheaval raised the question: What kind of life is the best to live? Is the "modern" world headed in the right direction, or are we going the wrong way? For writers in the South, such questions often involved a desire to protect tradition and myth from being destroyed by the influx of new ways of thinking and living.

Such questions found expression in attempts by social reformers to legislate the kind of society they wished to inhabit. One prominent result of such efforts was the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which, from 1919 to 1933, banned the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicants throughout the nation. According to historian Michael Parrish, "The prohibition battle divided the nation along sharp geographic, religious, and ethnic boundaries that defined much of America's political landscape" in the years following World War I. Specifically, the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment "symbolized the political and cultural victory of the small towns over the big cities; of evangelical and pietistic Protestants over Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews; of old-stock Anglo-Saxons over newer immigrants; and finally, of rich over poor." Like the Eighteenth Amendment, the countless "Jim Crow" laws that divided the South into black and white were also attempts to legislate a certain kind of society—in this case, one based on the racial divisions that had segregated U.S. society since the introduction of slavery nearly three centuries earlier. The Ku Klux Klan, which had virtually disappeared in the first decade of the twentieth century, was reborn in 1915 and remained a formidable force in U.S. politics and race relations—particularly in the South—for the next ten years.

Unit 13, "Southern Renaissance," explores some of the ways writers who either lived in, wrote about, or were otherwise associated with the South between 1920 and 1950 responded to the many changes during the period. Not surprisingly, much of the writing in this unit features the struggle

between those who embraced social change and those who were more skeptical or challenged social change outright. According to literary critic Richard H. King, "The writers and intellectuals of the South after the late 1920s were engaged in an attempt to come to terms not only with the inherited values of the southern tradition but also with a certain way of perceiving and dealing with the past, what Nietzsche called 'monumental' historical consciousness." In the work of John Crowe Ransom, Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wright, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Tennessee Williams, and Flannery O'Connor, the diverse wealth of voices in the early-twentieth-century South comes alive.

The video for Unit 13 explores some of the most influential texts from William Faulkner and Zora Neale Hurston, both of whom situate their writing firmly within the South even as they question southern myths and traditions. Both Faulkner and Hurston are concerned with questions of historical time: How does the past shape the present and future? To what extent are our lives predetermined by our skin color, economic situation, or what our ancestors have or have not done? In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, for example, multiple narrators attempt to discover, understand, and cope with the legacy of Thomas Sutpen, a Virginian of low birth who created a grand plantation out of the Mississippi wilderness of the 1830s and 1840s. In contrast to the gothic and sometimes malevolent qualities of Faulkner's novel, in "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" Hurston takes a stand against letting her skin color or the legacy of slavery determine who she is or what her life will be. "I am not tragically colored," Hurston asserts, going on to ask, "How *can* any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It's beyond me."

As the video explores the similarities and differences between these two influential writers, it introduces students to the complex relationship between writers and the place and time in and about which they write. How do Hurston and Faulkner depict "the South"? How do these texts engage the legacies of slavery as well as economic poverty? What innovative formal strategies did they use to bring their characters to life and to give their readers a rich sense of the South in the 1920s? What do Faulkner and Hurston seem to be saying about human possibility and about what America is or should be in the early twentieth century? Unit 13 helps answer these and related questions by situating Faulkner and Hurston within their literary and historical contexts, and by guiding students to connections between these writers and others in their era, as well as to writers within other units.

Through an exploration of the historical and literary contexts with which the Southern Renaissance was most concerned, the video, the archive, and the curriculum materials work together to give students a broad understanding of "the South" within the larger fabric of U.S. history in the early twentieth century. Those contexts include (1) the goals, values, and influence of the literary group known as the "Southern Agrarians"; (2) the extensive and complicated history of racial segregation in the South as maintained by "Jim Crow" laws and etiquette; (3) the rise of the motion picture as popular entertainment and the ways in which mass culture began to reshape American life; (4) the ways in which the increasing ubiquity of automobiles and an improved national highway system increased geographic mobility and encouraged the breakdown of local isolation; and (5) the system of tenancy farming, or sharecropping, under which many of the South's poorest inhabitants—both black and white—labored in the early twentieth century.

The archive and curriculum materials also make connections with how writers of the Southern Renaissance relate to those covered in other *American Passages* units: How does the Southern Renaissance relate to the Harlem Renaissance and other regional literary movements? How do writers of the Southern Renaissance relate to literary modernism and the "Lost Generation" with which that movement is often associated? How did writers like Hurston and Wright break new ground for literature written by African Americans? How does the "Southern gothic" tradition relate to earlier examples of the American gothic? How did southern writers benefit from the WPA, and what is their relationship to the farm workers' movement?

Student Overview

"Southern Renaissance" explores some of the ways writers who lived in, wrote about, or were otherwise associated with the South between 1920 and

1950 responded to the many changes during the period. Those changes included new developments in science, rapid industrialization, increasing urbanization, and large-scale immigration—primarily from the sagging South to the more robust North. Historians sometimes refer to these massive social and cultural transformations of the early twentieth century as distinctively "modern." For many of the writers covered in this unit, the change to "modern" times raised questions: What kind of life is the best to live? Is the "modern" world headed in the right direction, or are we going the wrong way?

As you will see in the video, writers such as William Faulkner and Zora Neale Hurston situate their writing firmly within the South even as they question southern myths and traditions. Both Faulkner and Hurston are concerned with how the past shapes the present and future. Like many of the other authors in this unit, Faulkner and Hurston raise many more questions: How much responsibility do we owe to the past? How should the history of racism in America be dealt with in the present? How does economic poverty shape human lives? What parts of southern tradition should we try to preserve, and what should we abandon as we transition to the "modern" world?

Unit 13 will introduce you to the diverse wealth of voices in the early-twentieth-century South through the works of John Crowe Ransom, Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wright, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Tennessee Williams, and Flannery O'Connor. In addition, it explores some of the major historical and cultural contexts that shaped this writing, including (1) the goals, values, and influence of the literary group known as the "Southern Agrarians"; (2) the extensive and complicated history of racial segregation in the South as maintained by "Jim Crow" laws and etiquette; (3) the rise of the motion picture as popular entertainment and the ways in which mass culture began to reshape American life; (4) the ways in which the increasing ubiquity of automobiles and an improved national highway system increased geographic mobility and encouraged the breakdown of local isolation; and (5) the system of tenancy farming, or sharecropping, under which many of the South's poorest inhabitants—both black and white—labored in the early twentieth century.

Video Overview

➢ **Authors covered:** William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston

➢ **Who's interviewed:** Dorothy Allison, award-winning author; Don Doyle, professor of history (Vanderbilt University); Carla Kaplan, professor of literature, American studies, and gender studies, (University of Southern California); Ramon Saldivar, professor of American literature (Stanford University); Alice Walker, award-winning author and poet; Rafia Zafar, director of African and Afro-American studies (Washington University, St. Louis)

➢ **Points covered:**

- After World War I, writers emerged in the segregated South to tell new stories. Continuing a tradition while challenging the past, writers such as William Faulkner and Zora Neale Hurston ushered in a renaissance of southern literature.
- Faulkner built upon the work of a group of writers known as the Southern Agrarians that emerged in the late 1920s. The Southern Agrarians defended the South's rural way of life while the world was changing around them.
- Faulkner captured the complicated, often tangled layers of southern history in countless novels and short stories. Intricately weaving the importance of time and place into everything he wrote, Faulkner was also a modernist who rebelled against linear storytelling. *As I Lay Dying*, with its nearly ludicrous plot and modernist style, is a good example of this stylistic innovation, while *Absalom, Absalom!*—a soul-searching indictment of the South—shows how some poor nineteenth-century whites tried to elevate themselves through racism, as a reaction against their own oppression.
- While Faulkner explored myths about white southerners, Zora Neale Hurston turned to African American folk traditions to present a positive view of black southern life. Hurston was a flamboyant storyteller, an anthropologist, and a respected writer.

Video Overview *(continued)*

- In her essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" Hurston observes that race is created, not given. As a folklorist and author, she captured a vision of the South that was different from what was usually recorded. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a woman's coming-of-age story and a critique of African American folk society.
- Hurston's final work was the autobiographical *Dust Tracks on a Road*, from which her publishers removed all anti-white references prior to publication. In the 1950s she slipped into obscurity; she died in poverty in 1960 and was buried in an unmarked grave. Hurston's writing was "rediscovered" by Alice Walker in 1973. She's now seen as the most important African American woman who wrote before World War II.
- Writers like Faulkner and Hurston joined their voices with those of other writers from the South to revise southern myths. At the same time, they broke through regional barriers to speak to the American experience and to the universal human condition.

PREVIEW

- **Preview the video:** In the decades following World War I, the United States experienced massive social and cultural changes in response to economic, industrial, and technological upheavals. This was especially true in the South, which had never fully recovered—economically or socially—from the Civil War and the effects of Reconstruction. Within this environment, writers like William Faulkner and Zora Neale Hurston emerged to write about the South, both its mythical past and its often harsh contemporary realities—including deeply entrenched racism and the hardships of lives lived under crushing poverty. Joined by the likes of Flannery O'Connor and Tennessee Williams, these writers participated in a reinvigoration of southern literature which has come to be known as the "Southern Renaissance."
- **What to think about while watching:** What are the main social and cultural factors that influence these writers? How do these writers depict the South? Does "the South" seem to be the same place for both Faulkner and Hurston, or do they each see it differently? What assumptions or beliefs do these writers challenge? How and why do these writers convey the importance of time and place in their writing? What are the formal innovations these writers use to convey their characters' experiences? What does the history of the critical reception of these authors tell us about American literature and the literary canon?
- **Tying the video to the unit content:** Unit 13 builds upon the introductory nature of the video to provide students with a variety of ways to understand how writers in the South responded to certain changes in American life throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The curriculum materials offer additional background on both Hurston and Faulkner, as well as on some of their prominent contemporaries in the fields of fiction, poetry, and drama. The unit also explores in greater detail some of the important contexts of southern writing, including the history of racism as seen in Jim Crow laws; the sharecropping system on which much of the rural South depended at this time; and the Southern Agrarian movement, in which a group of southern writers sought to promote an alternative future for the South.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE VIDEO

	What is American literature? What are its distinctive voices and styles? How do social and political issues influence the American canon?	***How do place and time shape literature and our understanding of it?***	***What characteristics of a literary work have made it influential over time?***
Comprehension Questions	What were the main social and cultural issues Faulkner and Hurston addressed in their writing? How were their responses to these issues different or similar?	What are the differences and similarities between the settings and characters created by Faulkner and Hurston?	Traditionally, stories have been told in a "linear" fashion, meaning that the story starts at the beginning and proceeds chronologically from one action or event to the next in a more or less straight line. Faulkner rebelled against this linear model, jumbling the chronology of his stories and thereby challenging readers to reassemble the action of the story in a logical manner. Consider both the subject matter of Faulkner's writing and the historical period in which he wrote: Why might Faulkner have chosen to write nonlinear stories?
Context Questions	Both Faulkner and Hurston are known for their innovative use of dialect. How do the characters' dialects help us relate to their social and economic conditions?	After the Civil War, hundreds of thousands of southerners—most of them black—headed north in search of better lives. This move, known as the "Great Migration," continued well into the 1920s and 1930s. How did the "Great Migration" influence Hurston's writing?	In the video you learned that Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* was published in the same year as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. In what ways does Faulkner's novel contest the vision of the South in *Gone With the Wind*?
Exploration Questions	Faulkner received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950, after which his books became increasingly popular. Hurston faded into obscurity at about this same time. What might account for the differences in the way these writers were received? Why do you think Hurston's work found a new audience in the 1970s? What historical events might have prepared that audience to be newly receptive to Hurston's work?	Like Faulkner and Hurston, many other writers are well known for their vivid evocations of the time and place about which they write. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald (Unit 11) is famous for his depiction of elite New York City society in the 1920s, while Henry David Thoreau (Unit 12) is renowned for his descriptions of life in early-nineteenth-century New England. Compare the different strategies these writers use to evoke the periods and places about which they write. Why are these strategies effective for depicting each time and place?	Hurston was often criticized during her lifetime for her realistic—but not always flattering—portrayals of African Americans. What did such critics hope to achieve, and how does such criticism fit in the larger context of African American writing in the twentieth century?

TIMELINE

	Texts	Contexts
1920s	Katherine Anne Porter, "Maria Concepcion" (1922), *Flowering Judas* (1930) William Faulkner, *The Marble Faun* (1924), *Soldier's Pay* (1926), *Mosquitos* (1927), *Sartoris* (1929), *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) John Crowe Ransom, *Here Lies a Lady* (1924)	Group of writers who would later come to be known as the Southern Agrarians publishes *The Fugitive* as an outlet for their poetry and criticism (1922–25) *State v. John Scopes* (the Scopes "Monkey" Trial), Dayton, Tennessee (1925) Wall Street crash begins the Great Depression (1929)
1930s	William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), "Barn Burning" (1938) Southern Agrarians publish *I'll Take My Stand*, by "Twelve Southerners" Zora Neale Hurston, "The Gilded Six-Bits" (1933), *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934), *Mules and Men* (1935), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind* (1936) Katherine Anne Porter, *Noon Wine* (1937), "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" (1939) Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (1939)	"Scottsboro Boys" (nine African American youths) tried for the alleged rape of two white women, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates (1931–37) Faulkner in Hollywood on contract as a scriptwriter (1932–37) Eighteenth Amendment repealed; Prohibition ends (1933) World War II begins (1939)
1940s	William Faulkner, *The Hamlet* (1940), *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) Richard Wright, *Native Son* (1940), *Black Boy* (1945) Eudora Welty, "Petrified Man" (1941), *The Robber Bridegroom* (1942) Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) Robert Penn Warren, "Bearded Oaks" (1942), *All the King's Men* (1946) Katherine Anne Porter, *The Leaning Tower* (1944) Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) *The Portable Faulkner*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (1946)	Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brings United States into World War II (1941) United States drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Japan surrenders, ending World War II. Cold War between United States and Soviet Union begins (1945) Jackie Robinson becomes first black major-league baseball player (1947)
1950s	Flannery O'Connor, "Good Country People" (1955) William Faulkner, *The Town* (1957), *The Mansion* (1959)	Senator Joseph McCarthy begins attacks on communism (1950) Korean War (1950–53) House Concurrent Resolution 108 dictates government's intention to "terminate" its treaty relations with the Native American tribes (1953) *Brown v. Board of Education* declares segregated schools unconstitutional (1954)

AUTHOR/TEXT REVIEW

John Crowe Ransom (1888–1974)

A leading force in southern letters from the 1920s on, John Crowe Ransom was born in Pulaski, Tennessee. Educated primarily at home in his early years by his parents, Ransom enrolled in Vanderbilt University as a young man of fifteen. Ransom's aca-demic excellence earned him a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford University in England, after which he taught high school briefly in Connecticut before returning to Vanderbilt to begin his career as an English professor.

Ransom's first volume of poetry, *Poems about God*, was published in 1919. Around that same time, Ransom became the center of a small group of poets who called themselves the **Fugitives** after the name of the magazine they began publishing in 1922 as an outlet for their poetry. Ransom produced his best and best-known poetry in the 1920s, including "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," "Philomela," "Piazza Piece," "Equilibrists," and "Janet Waking." His poetry is known for its tendency to expose the ironies of existence, primarily through short lyrics about often somber or serious domestic scenes—such as the death of a child or a "lady young in beauty waiting until [her] true love comes"—into which Ransom introduces some unsettling twist.

Although Ransom is respected as an accomplished poet, he had always tended toward philosophical and theoretical pursuits and these came to dominate much of his literary output beginning in the late 1920s. Like many of his southern peers, Ransom was incensed by the "laughing stock" the national press made of the South in its coverage of the Scopes evolution trial of 1925. At the urging of Donald Davidson, Ransom joined with eleven other southern men (including several who were also members of the Fugitives) to produce *I'll Take My Stand*, a volume of essays that praised southern traditions and the agrarian ways of life that dominated the Old South. For the next several years, Ransom explored **Agrarianism** at greater depth, while at the same time he began to write critical essays that described and defended poetry which could represent reality fully and completely without retreating into untrustworthy realms of abstraction.

[3696] Dorothea Lange, *Plantation Overseer. Mississippi Delta, near Clarksdale, Mississippi* (1936), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-009596-C DLC].

Ransom's critical pursuits soon led to the publication in 1938 of *The World's Body*, a collection of essays which laid much of the groundwork for what came to be known as **New Criticism**, an influential critical movement that sought to focus the critic's attention on the work of literature itself—its language and formal qualities—rather than on the historical and biographical context of the work. In that same year, two of Ransom's former students—Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren—published *Understanding Poetry*, which expressed many of the critical principles Ransom was advocating, and which eventually became the standard text for teaching poetry in colleges and universities throughout the nation.

RANSOM WEB ARCHIVE

[3696] Dorothea Lange, *Plantation Overseer. Mississippi Delta, near Clarksdale, Mississippi* (1936), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-009596-C DLC]. White overseer and land owner with black workers. Sharecropping initially appealed to freedmen because it promised benefits they had previously been denied. However, most sharecroppers ended up working in conditions that weren't much better than slavery.

[4704] Lewis W. Hine, *Home of Mrs. Jacob Stooksbury* (1933), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration [RG 142-H-174]. Family in living room of Lolston, Tennessee, home. The Southern Agrarians praised southern traditions, such as farming. John Crowe Ransom was known for using domestic scenes to deal with larger philosophical issues.

[7304] Anonymous, *Clarence Darrow at the Scopes Evolution Trial, Dayton, Tennessee, July 1925*, courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-15589]. The Scopes trial pitted John Thomas Scopes, a teacher from Dayton who had taught Darwin's theory of evolution in his science class, against the State of Tennessee. The case made national news, and the famed defense attorney Clarence Darrow was challenged by ministers to a series of debates on atheism and agnosticism. Critics of the South saw the trial as evidence of the region's lack of sophistication and progress.

Ransom left Vanderbilt for a position at Ohio's Kenyon College in 1937. Two years later he founded the *Kenyon Review*, an influential literary journal that he edited until his retirement from Kenyon in 1959.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Although many of Ransom's poems focus on common domestic scenes, each uses unexpected words and turns of phrase to question the contradictions of everyday life. For example, in "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter," a dead child's expression "Astonishes us all." At the end of the poem, the readers are "stopped" and "vexed" by the child's expression. Ask your students to think about the effect of these verbs in this context and to look for similar, unexpected language in Ransom's other poems.

■ Ransom is known for his frequent use of archaic language and references to classical texts and myths. Have your students identify some of these elements in Ransom's poems and discuss their contribution to the poems' overall effect.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What is "Janet Waking" about? Summarize the "events" the poem describes.

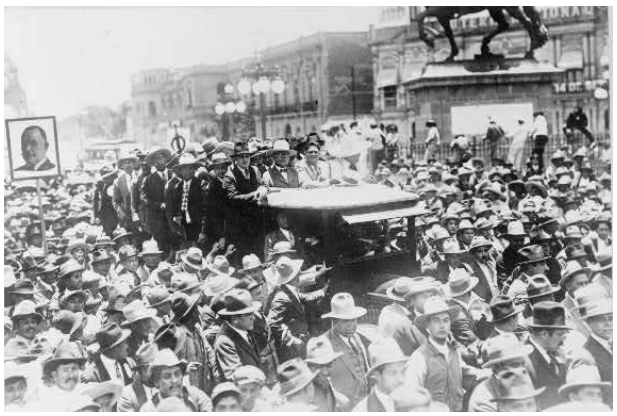
Context: As he contributed to the development of the New Criticism, Ransom argued that "criticism must become more scientific, or precise and systematic." Yet, in the 1920s, as a member of the Southern Agrarians, Ransom had denounced the increasing influence of modern science and the rationalization of human life. Why do you think Ransom eventually came to advocate a "scientific method" of literary criticism?

Exploration: As a writer of modern lyric poetry, Ransom argued that poetry could provide an alternative to science as a source of knowledge in the modern world. One of Ransom's contemporaries, T. S. Eliot, has been praised for writing poetry that challenges the authority of science and the value of its achievements. Yet Eliot (whom Ransom admired) depicted the world much differently in his poems than did Ransom. Compare Eliot's "The Hollow Men" with Ransom's "Philomela." If you consider each poem as an attempt to challenge the authority of science, what different strategies do these writers use to accomplish a similar goal?

Katherine Anne Porter (1890–1980)

"It is my firm belief," Katherine Anne Porter once said, "that all our lives we are preparing to be somebody or something, even if we do not do it consciously." Porter knew at a young age she wanted to be a writer, and she worked diligently and methodically toward that goal, achieving recognition as one of America's finest writers of short fiction by the time she reached the age of forty. Born Callie Russell Porter in a small log house in Indian Creek, Texas, Katherine Anne and her

three siblings were raised by their maternal grandmother after their mother died. The family lived in poverty, and when Porter turned sixteen she married a railroad clerk named John Henry Koontz—both to leave home and to find the financial security she'd never known. Porter did not take to domestic life, however, and soon separated from her husband, assumed the name Katherine Anne, and turned to a life of travel and career changes. After a serious bout with tuberculosis, Porter took her first job as a professional writer with the *Fort Worth Critic*, and from there she went on to live and work in Denver, New York City, Mexico, and Europe. Her first published story, "Maria Concepcion," appeared in the prestigious *Century* magazine in 1922 and was soon followed by "The Martyr," which was about the artist Diego Rivera. Porter's best-known story, "Flowering Judas," was published in 1930 in *Hound and Horn*; from then on, her reputation as a writer was secure.



[7280] Anonymous, *Crowds Surge around President-Elect General Obregon Entering Mexico City in a Truck with Ricardo Topete on His Right and Generals Manzo and Cruz on His Left* (1928), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115962].

Although her settings are often radically different (such as revolutionary Mexico and bohemian New York City), Porter's fiction is characterized by a strong sense of locale, and much of her work explores the tensions faced by women as they negotiate their place in the modern world. Porter's careful attention to planning and revising her work—sometimes over a period of several years—resulted in the publication of only four story collections and one novel, each considered a literary event. Her books of short fiction are *Flowering Judas* (1930), *Noon Wine* (1937), *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (1939), and *The Leaning Tower* (1944). Her novel *Ship of Fools* was begun in the early 1940s, but Porter developed and revised it for more than twenty years before it was finally published in 1961. The novel was a commercial success and was later made into a popular film. Porter's *Collected Stories* was published in 1965, bringing her the National Book Award, the Pulitzer Prize, and the Gold Medal for Fiction from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

TEACHING TIPS

■ "Flowering Judas" can be somewhat difficult for students to get into at first because of the lack of explication for its foreign setting. In preparation for reading the story, ask your students to look into the history of Mexico in the early twentieth century, focusing on the abundance of revolutionary activity during the period. (The decade of 1910–20 was an especially turbulent time in Mexico, as different leaders in different regions of the country mounted military campaigns against each other as well as the Mexican government. Many Mexicans found themselves caught between military leaders at local and regional levels, and power shifted from one faction to another repeatedly during the period.) After your students have read the story, ask them to use their research to discuss what Porter means when she says that Laura "wears the uniform of an idea, and has renounced vanities."

PORTER WEB ARCHIVE

[7280] Anonymous, *Crowds Surge around President-Elect General Obregon Entering Mexico City in a Truck with Ricardo Topete on His Right and Generals Manzo and Cruz on His Left* (1928), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115962]. Mexico City crowd scene. Katherine Anne Porter lived and worked in Mexico, in many locations, and used revolutionary Mexico City as a setting for "Flowering Judas," one of her short stories.

[7365] George Platt Lynes, *Katherine Anne Porter, Head-and-Shoulders Portrait, Facing Left* (1940), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-114332]. Portrait of southern writer Katherine Anne Porter. Porter was part of the Southern Renaissance in the first half of the twentieth century. Her only novel, *Ship of Fools*, was set in the 1930s aboard a German passenger liner.

[8615] Various, *The Story of the Sacco-Vanzetti Case* (1921), courtesy of Special Collections, Michigan State University Libraries. Written after the initial trial of Italian anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. They were originally arrested in 1920 on the charge of being "suspicious reds" but were later charged with the murder of two men. They were found guilty and executed in 1927, though over one hundred people had testified to their innocence. This pamphlet was partially designed to raise money for a new trial for the men. *The Never-Ending Wrong*, by Katherine Anne Porter, grapples with this case.

What does this suggest about Laura and the role she plays in the revolution?

■ In an interview in *The Paris Review*, Porter said that she had "no patience with this dreadful idea that whatever you have in you has to come out, that you can't suppress true talent. People can be destroyed; they can be bent, distorted, and completely crippled. To say that you can't destroy yourself is just as foolish as to say of a young man killed in war at twenty-one or twenty-two that that was his fate, that he wasn't going to have anything anyhow." Introduce your students to Porter's statements; then ask them to discuss them in small groups. Does Laura, the protagonist of "Flowering Judas," seem "bent" or "distorted" in any way? Does Porter's statement, above, give us a way of understanding these characters? What do Porter's thoughts suggest about authorship in general?

■ Good fictional characters commonly face a major problem or decision which develops from a misunderstanding, a value conflict with other characters, misinformation, or some other challenging situation. However, like many of the writers included in this unit, Porter often creates characters who seem challenged by some failing of their own—as a result of either some inner conflict or some past event that we as readers cannot directly access. Ask your students to analyze the characters in Porter's stories: What are these characters challenged by? Do these characters seem to be healthy human beings facing unusual obstacles, or do the characters themselves seem deficient in some way? For example, does Laura, the protagonist of "Flowering Judas," seem "bent" or "distorted" in any way? For purposes of comparison, invite your students to catalog the "deficiencies" of other protagonists, such as those created by Faulkner, O'Connor, or Williams. Why might southern authors create characters who seem to be, in some way, "damaged"?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What kinds of lives do the people in "Flowering Judas" lead? What clues does the story contain to help readers understand how its characters live?

Context: In her introduction to a 1940 edition of *Flowering Judas*, Porter wrote that she'd spent much of her life trying "to understand the logic of this majestic and terrible failure of the life of man in the Western World." Consider Porter's statement in light of World War I and World War II. How does "Flowering Judas" seem to reflect that "majestic and terrible failure"?

Context: The setting of "Flowering Judas" (revolutionary Mexico) might challenge students' concept of "southern" literature, yet thematically, the story is very much within the realm of the work of Porter's southern peers. For example, like similar characters in Faulkner's writing, Laura in "Flowering Judas" seems torn between repudiating her past and its traditions and accepting the revolutionary values of the world in which she finds herself. What does

such a setting and theme suggest about the meaning of "southern literature" in this period and its dominant preoccupations?

Exploration: In a sense, Porter was as much a fiction as any of her characters; at a young age she changed her name, and throughout her life she lied about her birth date, marriages, education, and work habits. More importantly, she denied she'd been raised in poverty on a Texas dirt farm and claimed instead to be the descendant of a romantically degenerating "white-pillar" family of the Old South. Why do you think Porter lied about her background? How might her lies have changed the way her writing was received in the 1930s and 1940s? What does this suggest about American "literature" and the critical establishment? By way of comparison, you might also consider the fact that William Faulkner changed his name (he added the "u" to his last name) and lied about such things as being wounded in World War I. Why would these writers feel compelled to fictionalize their own lives?

Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960)

Although she would later mislead people about her age and birthplace, Zora Neale Hurston was born in 1891 in Notasulga, Alabama, and later moved to the small, all-black town of Eatonville, Florida. Hurston would later write that she spent the first years of her life blissfully unaware of the racial oppression experienced by the vast majority of southern blacks in that era. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," Hurston's famous essay recounting this experience, sets the unapologetic, joyful, and defiant tone of much of her writing. Speaking about herself and her African American peers who came of age after the Civil War and the immediate turmoil of **Reconstruction**, Hurston writes: "No one on earth ever had a greater chance for glory. The world to be won and nothing to be lost." Such exuberant optimism did not please many of her fellow writers in the 1920s and 1930s, and Hurston died in poverty and total anonymity. However, Hurston's prominent position in American literary history today suggests that perhaps she was more prescient than she could have known.

After spending the first thirteen years of her life in Eatonville, Hurston was sent to school in Jacksonville, Florida, where she was quickly initiated into the segregated, Jim Crow South. Determined to be undeterred by the experience, Hurston eventually made her way to Washington, D.C. There she attended Howard University before moving on to New York, where she earned a B.A. degree from Barnard College in 1928. At Barnard she worked with renowned anthropologist Franz Boas, and in 1927, under Boas's direction, Hurston traveled to Louisiana and southern Florida to study and collect African American folktales. That trip produced *Mules and Men*, published in 1935 and celebrated as the first collection of African American folklore compiled and published by an African American. "The Eatonville Anthology," an anthropologically based narrative, sketches vivid images of Hurston's hometown and reveals her skill as an anthropologist.

[4565] Prentiss Taylor, *Zora Neale Hurston*, courtesy of Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Used with the permission of the Estate of Zora Neale Hurston.

HURSTON WEB ARCHIVE

[4565] Prentiss Taylor, *Zora Neale Hurston,* courtesy of Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Used with the permission of the Estate of Zora Neale Hurston. Photograph of Hurston dancing on couch. Known for her flamboyance and charisma, Hurston was sometimes urged by other artists to represent African Americans in more "dignified" ways.

[4566] Anonymous, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* dustcover (1937), courtesy of Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Zora Neale Hurston's best-known book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* was criticized by some African American authors and leaders because it did not emphasize and critique racial oppression.

[4811] Alan Lomax, *African American Child Singer for Singing Games* (1935), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-130896 DLC]. Girl standing in rural scene. Zora Neale Hurston was raised in Eatonville, the first all-black township in Florida, about which she wrote "The Eatonville Anthology," an anthropological narrative. Hurston spent the first years of her life unaware of the racial oppression experienced by the vast majority of southern blacks in the era. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," Hurston's famous essay recounting this experience, sets the unapologetic, joyful, and defiant tone of much of her writing.

[4819] Alan Lomax, *Zora Neale Hurston, Rochelle French, and Gabriel Brown, Eatonville, Florida* (1935), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ61-1777 DLC]. Used with the permission of the Estate of Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston talking with residents of her all-black hometown, Eatonville. While attending Barnard, Hurston worked with renowned anthropologist Franz Boas, and in 1927, under Boas's direction, Hurston traveled to Louisiana and southern Florida to study and collect African American folktales.

[5342] Zora Neale Hurston, *Shove It Over* (1933), courtesy of the Library of Congress [AFS 3136A:1]. Used with the permission of the Estate of Zora Neale

Hurston's short story "The Gilded Six-Bits" conveys the author's exuberant and optimistic voice. That voice also characterizes her most famous work, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel that earned her the scorn and condemnation of other African American writers of her day, notably Langston Hughes and, later, Richard Wright. But while her critics urged her to write novels that would "uplift the race" by showing white readers the oppression and degradation experienced by African Americans, Hurston instead worked to promote a vision of "racial health—a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings, a sense that is lacking in so much black writing and literature."

Hurston's writing won her great acclaim in the 1920s and 1930s, and her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), won an award from the *Saturday Review* for its contribution to positive race relations. Yet, despite her considerable success as a writer, Hurston virtually disappeared from the literary world from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. Thanks to an emerging black feminist movement and the special efforts of Alice Walker and Mary Helen Washington, Hurston was "rediscovered" in the mid-1970s. She is now widely regarded as the most important pre–World War II African American woman writer.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Hurston is often noted for her deft use of the South Florida African American vernacular and her masterful ability to integrate it smoothly with more standard English. Nevertheless, some students may initially be resistant to this; some might even be offended if they regard the vernacular as making Hurston's African American characters seem ignorant or comical. The audiobook version of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* can help students learn to read the dialect, while a few simple questions about Hurston's use of dialect should help your students appreciate the effect of this language. Why does Hurston have her characters talk this way? What does their language tell us about these characters? How is their use of vernacular related to the time and place about which Hurston is writing? Students should be encouraged to consult the table on Black English in Unit 8.

■ Although Hurston was trained as an anthropologist, her portrayals of southern life are not necessarily realistic. For example, in "The Gilded Six-Bits," Joe and Missie May are portrayed as childlike and simple. While this allows for a greater contrast between the couple's initial happiness and the estrangement that follows Missie May's infidelity, it hardly reflects the average life of African Americans in the rural South in 1933. The ease with which the couple's happiness is eventually restored is also not typical—infidelity was generally dealt with much more harshly in the rural South at this time. After pointing this out to your students, you might ask them to think about why Hurston chose to create characters like Missie May and Joe. What advantage is there for a writer in depicting the world as we wish it was,

rather than as we actually find it? What are the disadvantages of this strategy? Such conversation should also help your students better understand the critical debates surrounding Hurston's work—both in her own time and today.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: How would you characterize the tone of the short folktales that comprise "The Eatonville Anthology"?

Context: In 1933, the year Hurston wrote "The Gilded Six-Bits," the United States was being transformed by an increasingly mobile population. As automobiles became more affordable, the national highway system developed to allow people a greater freedom of movement than they'd ever experienced before. At the same time, chain department stores, national radio broadcasts, and a mature system of motion picture distribution meant that even remote, rural towns had begun to feel the effects of the new mass culture. In Hurston's story, Missie May and Joe seem to live a blissful and largely carefree existence, but their happiness is interrupted by the appearance of "Otis D. Slemmons, of spots and places." If Slemmons symbolizes many of the changes described above, what does Hurston seem to be saying about those changes?

Context: In "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," Hurston writes: "Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you." How does this perspective compare with the experience of other African Americans living in the segregated, Jim Crow South? Compare Hurston's sentiments here to those expressed by Richard Wright in "The Man Who Was Almost a Man."

Exploration: Both Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes were closely associated with the literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance (see Unit 10). However, unlike Harlem Renaissance writers who produced writing that focused on the experience of the growing population of urban, middle-class African Americans, Hurston and Hughes chose to write about African American folk cultures and to employ more vernacular in their writing. Read Hughes's "Mother to Son" and "The Weary Blues." How does Hughes's poetry complement the picture of African American life Hurston creates in "The Gilded Six-Bits"?

Hurston. Under the direction of renowned anthropologist Franz Boas, Hurston traveled to Louisiana and southern Florida in 1927 to study and collect African American folktales. This lining rhythm was collected from Charlie Jones on a railroad construction camp near Lakeland, Florida. Before mechanization, songs helped coordinate workers as they aligned railroad tracks using steel "lining bars."

[7305] R. H. Hoffman, *Anthropologist Franz Boas* (c. 1945), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-93360 DLC]. One of the best-known anthropologists of the twentieth century, Franz Boas taught Zora Neale Hurston and Margaret Mead. His contributions to the field include historical particularism—the idea that anthropology should focus on the uniqueness and specificity of cultures rather than universal laws.

William Faulkner (1897–1962)

The man who would become one of twentieth-century American literature's best-known figures, William Cuthbert Falkner (he added the "u" to his last name later in life) was born in Albany, Mississippi. Four years later, the Falkners moved to nearby Oxford, which William would call home for the rest of his life. Faulkner's childhood was fairly

[6948] Jack E. Boucher, *South front and west side, Rowan Oak, Old Taylor Rd., Oxford, Lafayette County, MS* [*William Faulkner's old house*] (1975), courtesy of the Library of Congress [HABS, MISS, 36-OXFO, 9-4].

average for a young middle-class white boy of the period: he grew up surrounded by romantic and glorious tales of the **Old South**, many of them handed down from his grandfather, William Clark Falkner, a somewhat legendary figure who managed to become a colonel in the Civil War and went on to become a planter, lawyer, novelist, and builder of railroads before being shot dead by a former business partner in 1889. However, by the time Faulkner reached his late teens he began showing signs that his was not to be an average life. After dropping out of high school, he tried working in his grandfather's bank, but quickly gave that up and, in the face of his father's and the rest of his community's disapproval, decided to pursue a career as a poet. During this time, Faulkner was courting a local belle, Estelle Oldham, but when her family refused to approve of his unconventional behavior, Estelle married someone else, and Faulkner promptly left for Canada to join the RAF (Royal Air Force). (She later divorced her husband and married Faulkner in 1929.) Faulkner saw no action in World War I, and once it was over he returned to Oxford, where he briefly attended classes at the University of Mississippi. He continued to write poetry, publishing his first collection of poems, *The Marble Faun,* near the end of 1924 (the title consciously echoed that of Nathaniel Hawthorne's romantic novel about the conflict between American and Old World values). Despite this small success, Faulkner's writing life did not truly begin until he met another writer, Sherwood Anderson, who advised him to develop his prose and to concentrate on what he knew best—the Mississippi of his youth. It took three novels—*Soldier's Pay* (1926), *Mosquitos* (1927), and *Sartoris* (1929)—for Faulkner to develop his prose skills into their early greatness, but with the October 1929 publication of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner's writing life had truly begun.

Like *Sartoris* and *The Sound and the Fury,* Faulkner's next novel, *As I Lay Dying* (1930), was set in Yoknapatawpha County, the fictional representation of the Oxford area that Faulkner would continue to develop in subsequent novels. Also like its predecessor, *As I Lay Dying* was written in a **stream of consciousness** style, using fifteen different narrators who deliver fifty-nine interior monologues from which readers must assemble the story, as if putting together a puzzle. The fragmented nature of Faulkner's narratives marks them as examples of literary modernism, a movement which sought to challenge artistic conventions and provide its audience with new ways of seeing the world. More recently, critics have explored the ways in which Faulkner's use of pastiche and multiple, often contradictory voices within a single work may have been a forerunner of what later came to be called postmodern fiction.

Although he continued to write throughout his life, critics generally agree that Faulkner produced his best work in the 1930s and early 1940s, including *Light in August* (1932) and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)—which many believe to be his masterpiece. Faulkner received the Nobel Prize in 1950.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Students will likely find *As I Lay Dying* confusing, difficult to relate to, and depressing. They are more likely to appreciate the novel if you preface their reading with a short introduction to Faulkner and to the modernist techniques he uses to tell his story. After students have read a few of the monologues, spend some class time letting them discuss the fragmentation and dislocation they feel; then use their comments to explore the epistemological and ontological questions the novel raises. How do Faulkner's characters know what they know? How do *we* know what we know? How do the Bundrens come to be who they are? How do *we* become who we are? Can we consider any of the novel's fifteen different narrators "reliable"? Working in groups, ask your students to write a character sketch of each of the novel's fifteen narrators. The sketch should describe the character and his or her context. After students have completed their sketches, ask each group to share their description and to tell the class whether their narrator is reliable and why.

■ Because Faulkner looms as such an imposing figure over the American literary canon, you may need to push your students to be critical of his authority. One way to do this is to ask your students to think about Faulkner's social position and compare it to that of the Bundren family in *As I Lay Dying*. To help your students understand the Bundrens a bit better, ask them to create a family/relationship tree that indicates with arrows how the characters are connected to one another and which gives the page number and chapter title in which we learn of the characters' personalities. Using their relationship trees as points of reference, ask your students to consider some of the following questions: What would someone of Faulkner's social standing typically think of people like the Bundrens? Is Faulkner making fun of the Bundrens, and if so, why? At what points do we want to laugh at the Bundrens? Why? At what points do we want to weep? Does the novel suggest any reasons for the Bundren's poverty? Why, for example, is Anse Bundren depicted as someone who never breaks a sweat?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Who are the Bundrens? What is their position in their community? What do their neighbors seem to think of them? How does their community's impression of the Bundrens affect our impression of them?

Comprehension: What drives Anse Bundren and his children to put themselves through all the trials required to bury Addie in Jefferson? Why don't the Bundrens just bury Addie at home? Do Anse and his children seem motivated by love and respect for their dead wife and mother, or are they driven by other forces?

Comprehension: In the opening scene of "Barn Burning," in which Mr. Harris has accused Abner Snopes of burning his barn, Harris suggests the judge question Sarty about the incident, but the judge hesitates and Harris eventually changes his mind. Why don't these

FAULKNER WEB ARCHIVE

[3309] Letter, *Philip Avery Stone to John Sharp Williams requesting support for William Faulkner's appointment as postmaster at the University of Mississippi* (1922), courtesy of the Library of Congress [A86]. This position of postmaster was a way for Faulkner to earn an income and continue writing, as it paid a full salary, but did not require full-time work.

[5122] Anonymous, *Rowan Oak, Old Taylor Rd., Oxford, Lafayette County, MS*, courtesy of the Library of Congress [HABS, Miss, 36-OXFO, 9-]. William Faulkner's home in Mississippi. Highly formalized in their layout, large plantations usually centered on the "big house," an imposing, often neoclassical structure designed as an expression of the good taste and prosperity of the owner.

[6948] Jack E. Boucher, *South front and west side, Rowan Oak, Old Taylor Rd., Oxford, Lafayette County, MS [William Faulkner's old house]* (1975), courtesy of the Library of Congress [HABS, MISS, 36-OXFO, 9-4]. The myth of the "Old South" generally referred to the "plantation legend" of antebellum (and much postbellum) popular fiction that portrayed white southerners as genteel aristocrats and slavery as a benevolent, paternal institution from which blacks and whites benefited equally. Although Faulkner grew up in a neoclassical "big house," he challenged this myth in his fiction.

[7488] Anonymous, *William Faulkner Handed 1949 Nobel Prize of $30,000 for Literature* (1949), courtesy of AP/Wide World Photos. Some audiences eagerly anticipated Faulkner's acceptance of the Nobel Prize, as he rarely spoke publicly or dressed formally.

men want to ask Sarty to testify against his father? What does their reluctance to do so tell us about how they view the Snopes family?

Context: Compare Faulkner's depiction of a poor white southern family in "Barn Burning" to the Southern Agrarians' praise of the rural, soil-centered life. How does the Snopes family match up with the Agrarians' ideals?

Exploration: Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County can sometimes seem like the land that time forgot. This is especially true in *As I Lay Dying*, in which much of the plot unfolds in rural areas which, while geographically not far from the somewhat modern community of Jefferson, seem separated from the modern world by a much wider gulf. While historians of the 1920s and 1930s emphasize the increasing pace of industrialization and technological change that was reshaping the world between the wars, the citizens of Yoknapatawpha County seem oblivious. Yet, in a more indirect sense, the effects of these global changes are inescapably woven into Faulkner's texts. Discuss the ways in which the larger changes in the "outside world" contribute to Faulkner's imaginary world.

Exploration: Because of the dark settings and disturbing themes of much of his writing, Faulkner is often regarded as a master of the **southern gothic**. How does Faulkner compare to other "gothic" writers, such as Edgar Allan Poe or Nathaniel Hawthorne? (See Unit 6.) In what ways are Hawthorne and Faulkner concerned with "the sins of the fathers"? How similar or different are their views of these "sins"?

Thomas Wolfe (1900–1938)

Known for his ability to produce lyrical torrents of largely autobiographical prose, Thomas Wolfe earned critical and commercial success with his first novel, *Look Homeward Angel* (1929), but struggled to live up to his own reputation for the rest of his short life.

[7266] Marion Post Walcott, *Farmhouse and Barns near Asheville, North Carolina* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-052386-D DLC].

Born Thomas Clayton Wolfe in Asheville, North Carolina, Wolfe was the youngest of eight children. He attended a private school in Asheville before going on to the University of North Carolina when he was just shy of his sixteenth birthday. It was at UNC that Wolfe began writing in earnest—first as a reporter for the school paper (of which he eventually became editor), and then as a budding playwright. After graduation, Wolfe went to Harvard to study playwriting at the 47 Workshop with George Pierce Baker. There, Wolfe produced two notable plays, *Mannerhouse* and *Welcome to Our City*, both of which featured a satirical style inspired by that of the most infamous critic of the South's cultural and intellectual sterility, H. L. Mencken. However, the sheer length of his plays (*Welcome to Our City* was nearly four hours from curtain to curtain) and his intensely personal narrative style were poorly suited

to drama, and Wolfe soon became frustrated by his lack of success as a playwright.

In August 1925, as he was returning to New York from Europe, Wolfe met and fell in love with Aline Bernstein. Almost twenty years Wolfe's senior and an accomplished scene designer in the New York theater, Bernstein encouraged Wolfe to pursue prose fiction instead of drama. With the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel* four years later, Wolfe's literary reputation finally seemed secure. A largely autobiographical story of a young Southerner coming of age, the novel was hailed by some as an American answer to James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and made such an impression that in 1947 even William Faulkner ranked Wolfe ahead of himself as the most important American writer of the 1920s and 1930s.

The success of *Look Homeward, Angel* allowed Wolfe to continue traveling and gathering material for his writing. Wolfe's experiences during these years—as well as his continued association with Bernstein—encouraged him to explore the Jewish themes with which some of his later writing was concerned. According to biographer Hugh Holman, "In 1936, leaving Berlin on a train, an incident with a Jew trying to escape Germany forced [Wolfe] to recognize the cruel nature of the Nazi state, and on returning home he wrote one of his most powerful short novels, *I Have a Thing To Tell You,* a strong indictment of Germany, which was serialized in the *New Republic*. Like many of his short novels, it was later incorporated in expanded form in one of his novels, in this case *You Can't Go Home Again*."

Yet, despite having plenty of new material, Wolfe struggled to produce a followup to *Look Homeward, Angel*, and eventually was forced to rely heavily on the talents of his editor at Scribner's, Maxwell Perkins (who also worked with F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway), to help him pare down and shape the unwieldy manuscript that eventually became Wolfe's second novel, *Of Time and the River* (1935). The effort was a popular success, but critics charged that Wolfe's passionate but personal style was becoming tiresome and overindulgent; they also questioned whether Wolfe depended too heavily on Perkins to structure his work. In an effort to prove his ability as a writer, Wolfe changed publishers and worked furiously to produce a third novel. Mere months before his untimely death from tuberculosis, Wolfe delivered his final manuscript (thousands of pages) to his new editor, Edward Aswell at Harper's. After Wolfe's death, Aswell shaped the manuscript into two novels, *The Web and the Rock* (1939) and *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940). Both books continued the story of Wolfe's own life, but included a larger social vision that answered at least some of his critics' complaints.

TEACHING TIPS

■ As in *As I Lay Dying*, the narrative changes in the "The Lost Boy" can be confusing to students. Ask students to chart the narrative changes in the story by listing the different narrators, the page on which the narration changes, and the specific textual devices Wolfe

uses to indicate the change. Use your students' charts to talk about the importance of the different narrators to the overall effect of the story.

■ Wolfe's career raises questions about what an "author" is or does. Can we call Wolfe the author of *Of Time and the River* if the book was largely "shaped" by his editor? What is authorship? To help students think about such questions, ask them to write a definition of authorship, then have them discuss their definitions. How important is it that the reader be able to define what an author is or does?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why is Robert so concerned with "Time" in the first third of "The Lost Boy"? Notice how time seems to stop for Robert in certain places. How does his concern with the passage of time relate to the later sections of the story?

Context: Compare "The Lost Boy" to Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man." Like Wright, Wolfe was at least partially inspired by H. L. Mencken's sharp critiques of the South and its people. In what ways do both Wright and Wolfe seem concerned with "lost boys"? How are their lost boys similar? In what ways do they seem different?

Context: During Wolfe's life, new technologies of mass media—primarily radio and motion pictures—sparked the growth of a mass culture that brought many changes to the small southern communities Wolfe writes about. With this in mind, how might we read "The Lost Boy" as a story about Wolfe's life and literary career? In what ways was Wolfe himself "lost"? In what ways might we think of it as the story of "the South" more generally?

Exploration: Much of the fiction produced after World War II can be read as responding in some way to the horrific events of that conflict, including the Jewish Holocaust and the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As you can see from Unit 15, "Poetry of Liberation," many writers in the second half of the twentieth century attempted to confront the question of what it means to be human after witnessing the extent of the cruelty humans can inflict on one another. Compare Thomas Wolfe to a few of the writers in Unit 15. In what ways are Wolfe's concerns similar to those of later writers? In what ways are they different?

Exploration: What is the role of critical taste in determining a work's value? Literary taste changed during the interval between the publication of Wolfe's first two books (1929–35). During that time, Marxist critics began demanding socially conscious fiction, while New Critics were looking for structurally unified works. Neither critical perspective was pleased by the lack of structure and the personal style that characterized Wolfe's books. How does the rise and fall of Wolfe's literary reputation compare with that of Zora Neale Hurston? What might the critical reception of these authors tell us about what makes "great" American literature?

WOLFE WEB ARCHIVE

[7266] Marion Post Walcott, *Farmhouse and Barns near Asheville, North Carolina* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-052386-D DLC]. Photograph of farmhouse, barns, rolling hills, trees, and fields. An example of the agricultural life that the Agrarian writers extolled, this town was Thomas Wolfe's birthplace.

[7274] Carl Van Vechten, *Portrait of Thomas Wolfe*, courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-42508 DLC]. Posed portrait of author Thomas Wolfe. Wolfe was known for his autobiographical fiction, particularly the novel *Look Homeward, Angel*, a southern coming-of-age story.

[7728] Don Doyle, Interview: "Mencken's Ridicule of the South and the Agrarians' Response" (2002), courtesy of Annenberg Media. Doyle discusses H. L. Mencken's dismissal of southern artistry. Mencken was well known for his acerbic wit, and Southern Agrarian writers defended the South against his attacks. Doyle is the Nelson Tyrone Jr. Professor of History at Vanderbilt University.

Robert Penn Warren (1905–1989)

A prominent member of the Southern Agrarians as well as an accomplished poet and novelist, Robert Penn Warren was born in southern Kentucky and educated at Vanderbilt, the University of California, Yale, and Oxford. While at Vanderbilt he became one of the "Fugitive poets" and later contributed a somewhat reluctant defense of "separate but equal" racial segregation to *I'll Take My Stand*, the political manifesto of the Southern Agrarians, who were also associated with Vanderbilt. (Like many southerners, Warren later changed his mind about segregation.) He began teaching English at Louisiana State University in 1934 and there co-founded the *Southern Review*, which published provocative essays by the "New Critics," passionate advocates of "close reading," as well as fiction by emerging southern writers such as Eudora Welty. Warren's influence on the New Criticism was considerable; *Understanding Poetry*—which Warren co-authored with Cleanth Brooks while both were at Louisiana State—helped revolutionize the teaching of literature within the American university. That volume was followed in 1943 by *Understanding Fiction*. Warren left Louisiana State that same year.

[4730] Marion Post Walcott, *Political poster on sharecropper's house, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-020570-M3].

Much of Warren's own prose and poetry grows out of his critical engagement with the history of the American South. That engagement was evident in his biography of abolitionist John Brown, which he undertook while at Yale and published in 1929. Warren's third and best-known novel, *All the King's Men*, which chronicles the rise and fall of a southern politician, received the Pulitzer Prize in 1946. Like Warren's second novel, *Heaven's Gate* (1943), *All the King's Men* was concerned with power and the way its pursuit and acquisition can destroy both the powerful and those around them. Warren returned to the theme in his fourth and perhaps second-best novel, *World Enough and Time*, published in 1950. Though he went on to write six more novels over the next thirty years, none would equal the power and eloquence of these earlier efforts.

The mid-fifties onward were fruitful years for Warren the poet. His long poem *Audubon* (1969), one of his most significant works, reveals a writer who celebrates the necessity that humans must face the darkness in their natures and forge ahead. Warren advocated a poetry "grounded in experience" and declared that the goal of the artist should be to stay within the limits of his/her gifts and, to the extent that those gifts allow, "to remain faithful to the complexities of the problems with which [he/she] is dealing." Warren's volumes of poetry include *Incarnations* (1968), *Now and Then* (1978), *Being Here* (1980), *Rumor Verified* (1981), and *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce* (1983).

TEACHING TIPS

■ "Bearded Oaks," one of Warren's early poems, provides a good starting point for students. You might begin by trying to get students to think about the somewhat incongruous imagery within the poem: Where is the poem set? Who is the poem about? What doesn't seem to

WARREN WEB ARCHIVE

[4730] Marion Post Walcott, *Political poster on sharecropper's house, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-020570-M3]. Campaign poster for Joe Hidgon, chancery clerk. Living conditions for sharecroppers were generally poor as they rarely made large profits and often had enormous debts. African American sharecroppers were also barred from voting and often received no education.

[7284] Lewis Wickes Hine, *Starting Card in Motion, Picket Yarn Mill, High Point, North Carolina* (1937), courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration [NWDNS-69-RP-230]. Young man working in factory. Southern Agrarian writers expressed mixed feelings about industrial development and extolled the region's rural, agricultural traditions.

[7611] Ralph Clynne, *Gloucester, Lower Woodville Rd., Natchez Vic., Adams County, MS* (1934), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [HABS, MISS, 1-NATCH. V, 1-1]. This photograph depicts the same plantation house shown in [4735] and [7654]. The house's dilapidated condition echoes the degradation of the myths of the South.

fit with this description of people "waiting" in the grass? Break your students into groups. Ask one group to describe the characters in the poem—who are they and what are they doing? Have the other group describe the poem's settings in their own words—what are the different settings, and how do they affect the meaning of the poem? Finally, have the groups work together to match the characters with the settings to arrive at a better idea of the meaning of the poem. Try to guide your students toward the poem's metaphysical concerns, its meditation on the inevitability of decay, and its fear that true human communication may not be possible. What does the allusion to an underwater setting suggest? What happens to organic matter under water? What is the significance of the "debate" that is "voiceless" here?

■ In poems such as "Audubon," Warren turned his lifelong interest in history into an exploration of the human condition. After they've read "Audubon," ask your students to re-create the poem in prose, paying attention to the dual nature of the poem. What history does the poem recount? What is the story of human nature it seems to be telling? Have your students write a short (one-page) prose story that attempts to capture these histories.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Much of Warren's poetry is grounded in particular places and relies for its effect on specific descriptions of landscape. Compare the setting of "Bearded Oaks" to that of "Mortal Limit." What settings and what kind of "mood" does each evoke? If we consider that both poems are concerned with the journey of life, how do their different settings help Warren create different variations on this similar theme?

Context: In "American Portrait: Old Style," the speaker tells us that his childhood friend, K, who was known as a good baseball pitcher in his youth, has grown old and thin. Review lines 105–09, in which K considers the passage of time. Compare K's actions to the position taken by the Southern Agrarians with regard to "modern progress" in the South. What might "the big brown insulator" symbolize? Also consider the speaker's conclusions in the final stanza of "American Portrait." How do the speaker's feelings about time and "progress" compare with K's, above? What might Warren's poem be saying about southern history and the passage of time more generally?

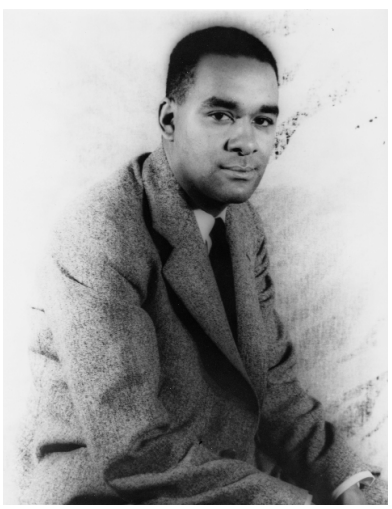
Exploration: In the late 1920s and 1930s, Robert Penn Warren expressed support for racial segregation, but he later changed his mind. Like Warren, other prominent writers of the early twentieth century expressed controversial views that later became very unpopular. For example, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (Unit 10) were attracted to fascism and some of their writing has been called anti-semitic. Yet, despite these unpopular views, writers like Warren, Eliot, and Pound are considered among America's best authors. As readers and critics, how should an author's political and social views affect our reception of his or her works?

Richard Wright (1908–1960)

Richard Wright grew up during some of the darkest days of racial segregation in the American South, and the horrors that he experienced and witnessed during that time became the material on which he built his reputation as one of the most important voices in American literature in the first half of the twentieth century. The son of black sharecroppers Nathan and Ella Wright, Richard was born in rural Mississippi. Wright's father abandoned his family when Richard was only five, and after that Wright moved around the South every few years before finally settling in Jackson, Mississippi, at the age of eleven. Forced by poverty to drop out of school, Wright went to work, first as a helper in an optical company and later as a porter in a clothing store and a "hall-boy" in a hotel. As he details in "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," each job taught Wright new lessons about the tenuousness of life for an African American in the segregated South.

Although his first story was published in an African American newspaper in Mississippi when Wright was in the eighth grade, Wright claimed to have awakened as a reader and writer during the mid-1920s, when he read H. L. Mencken's withering attacks on the South's social, racial, and intellectual failings. Yet it was to be more than ten years before Wright was able to find the voice that would gain him international fame, first with *Uncle Tom's Children* (a collection of short stories published in 1938), followed by *Native Son* in 1940, and finally the autobiographical *Black Boy* in 1945.

With *Native Son*, Wright said he was determined to create a book (and character) that was difficult to face. This determination sprang from the positive reception of *Uncle Tom's Children*, which did not have the effect on its readers for which Wright had hoped. "When the reviews of that book began to appear, I realized that I had made an awfully naïve mistake. I found that I had written a book which even bankers' daughters could read and weep over and feel good about. I swore to myself that if I ever wrote another book, no one would weep over it; that it would be so hard and deep that they would have to face it without the consolation of tears. It was this that made me get to work in dead earnest." Wright's effort paid off; he is now known for his unflinching, realistic, and purposely anti-romantic portraits of the racial prejudice, oppression, and hypocrisy he experienced and witnessed during much of his life.



[4013] Carl Van Vechten, *Portrait of Richard Wright* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-42502 DLC].

TEACHING TIP

■ Richard Wright is probably best known for his aggressive portrayal of African American characters like Dave, who are unhappy and unsatisfied with their lives but seemingly unable to do much to improve their situation. If you've read *Native Son*, it might be worthwhile talking to your students about Bigger Thomas and the controversy surrounding that novel. This might be a good way to introduce them to "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," but it could also be part of a follow-up class in which you discuss Dave's possible destination and future. Where is he going on that train? What will he find there?

WRIGHT WEB ARCHIVE

[4013] Carl Van Vechten, *Portrait of Richard Wright* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-42502 DLC]. Richard Wright's works, including *Native Son*, dealt with racism and the experiences of African Americans. Journalist Van Vechten used his photographs to promote black artists and writers. Van Vechten is also known for his controversial novel, *Nigger Heaven* (1926), about Harlem.

[4803] Arthur Rothstein, *Family of Negro Sharecropper, Little Rock, Arkansas* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-006019-M4]. Photograph of African American sharecropper holding child. Sharecropping was a common occupation in the South, but often paid very little, despite the tedious and arduous nature of the work. Novelist Richard Wright was born into a Mississippi sharecropping family. His father deserted the family when Wright was five. Wright's novel *Black Boy* discusses life for southern blacks during this era.

[5085] Esther Bubley, *A Rest Stop for Greyhound Bus Passengers on the Way from Louisville, Kentucky, to Nashville, Tennessee, with Separate Accommodations for Colored Passengers* (1943), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-62919]. The overwhelming destructiveness of segregation has been well documented in the literary realm, particularly in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, a work which inspired James Baldwin, who focused on the interrelated nature of race and sexuality, and Ralph Ellison, whose *Invisible Man* portrayed the physiological terrorism of racial discrimination upon a black man's life.

[5460] Courier Lithograph Company, *Uncle Tom's Cabin—On the Levee* (1899), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Theatrical Poster Collection. Poster for a theater production shows happy slaves dancing. Post–Civil War "Uncle Tom Shows" were often performed by whites in blackface. By presenting blacks as subservient, without physical, intellectual, moral, or sexual power, such shows gave the term "Uncle Tom" its current derogatory meaning.

Does Wright suggest that it's inevitable that Dave will become Bigger Thomas, or does the story end more ambiguously than that? Use these questions to get your students thinking about the larger implications of the story; then ask them to consider contemporary parallels for Dave. Where might Dave be found today? Instead of plowing a field, what might Dave's job be? Have your students freewrite for ten minutes in response to these questions; then ask them to share their responses with the class.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Dave thinks owning a gun will show those around him that he's a "man." What does being a man seem to mean to Dave? What are a few of the specific things Dave thinks a gun will change about his life?

Comprehension: Discuss the possible reasons Wright chose to have Dave kill the mule, Jenny. Why does Dave talk to Jenny like she can understand him? Why does he refer to her by name? Is Jenny more than a mule to Dave (at least for purposes of this story)? What kinds of things might a mule symbolize? How might such symbolism relate to Dave's situation in life or to the history of African Americans in the United States more generally?

Context: "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" is set in the midst of the Great Depression, a time of economic hardship for the vast majority of Americans. During this time (in what later came to be called the Great Migration), hundreds of thousands of southerners headed north in search of better lives, despite the fact that economic conditions were often no better there. At the end of Wright's story, Dave has hopped aboard the Illinois Central and is heading "away, away to somewhere, somewhere where he could be a man. . . ." The story does not tell us whether Dave is heading north or south. Do you think that "somewhere" exists? If so, what kind of future does this story suggest Dave is going to have?

Context: Like Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright saw himself as an outsider in the literary world, largely writing against the grain of what his critics thought he should be doing. But while Hurston wrote about African Americans who sometimes seem untouched, or at least "undiminished," by racism, poverty, and segregation, Wright created characters who are complete opposites of hers. For example, in "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," Dave's life seems greatly determined by his poverty and by his social position relative to the people around him—both black and white. If both writers hoped to improve the lives of African Americans through their work, what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of their different approaches to achieving this goal?

Context: In its coverage of the Scopes evolution trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, the national press, led by H. L. Mencken, ridiculed the South as backward, bigoted, and intellectually empty. But while Mencken's attacks on the South inspired Wright to begin writing about his own experiences of southern racial oppression,

the Southern Agrarians responded very differently to Mencken's characterization of the South. Compare Wright's response to that of the Southern Agrarians. How do you account for the difference? What does this difference suggest about the Southern Agrarians? What does it suggest about Wright?

Exploration: In his 1949 essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," James Baldwin (Unit 14) attacked the way African Americans were portrayed in works ranging from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe (Unit 7) to *Native Son* by Richard Wright. According to Baldwin, although the goal of these "protest novels" might have been to call attention to African American suffering as a way of improving the lives of blacks in America, the characters in these novels merely perpetuated stereotypes because they were flat, one-dimensional, and seemed trapped by their social conditions. After reading Stowe, Wright, and Baldwin, think about how the portrayal of African Americans changed in the century between Stowe and Baldwin. Do you agree or disagree with Baldwin's attack on his predecessors?

Eudora Welty (1909–2001)

Eudora Alice Welty was born in Jackson, Mississippi, where she lived nearly all of her life. A first-generation Mississippian, Welty grew up in comfortable circumstances and developed an early love of reading. After graduating from the local high school at age sixteen, Welty spent two years at Mississippi State College for Women before transferring to the University of Wisconsin, where she earned a B.A. in English in 1929. She declared her intention of becoming a writer, but decided to go into advertising after her father expressed concern that she would be unable to support herself and that writing was perhaps a waste of time. "He was not a lover of fiction," Welty once recalled, "because fiction is not true, and for that flaw it was forever inferior to fact." But Welty continued to write, and her job interviewing poor rural southerners and writing stories as a publicity agent for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) helped her develop her ability to capture dialogue and bring to life the variety of situations that would comprise her later fiction. In addition to her writing, the photographs Welty took to accompany her WPA stories have become an important part of her legacy as a southern storyteller. By 1936 Welty had begun publishing stories in several small but influential southern journals, and she quickly attracted the notice of established writers such as Robert Penn Warren and Katherine Anne Porter. Porter was especially encouraging; she eventually wrote the preface to Welty's first collection of stories, *A Curtain of Green*, published in 1941.

Welty's writing is rooted in the places she knew best—small southern towns peopled with seemingly ordinary characters who love to talk and whose conversation reveals their complex and often wryly amusing interior lives. Many of her best-known and most frequently anthologized stories—such as "Why I Live at the P.O." or "Petrified Man"—

[5169] Ben Shahn, *Two Women Walking along Street, Natchez, Mississippi* (1935), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-006093-M4 DLC].

feature characters who seem to thrive on the tension and unpredictability that arises from teasing, taunting, or bickering with each other, yet who generally seem to be friends despite their differences. By dramatizing the ordinary and everyday conversations of her characters, Welty often demonstrates that differences can bring people together, just as much as they can tear them apart.

Welty won numerous literary awards in her lifetime, including three O'Henry prizes, a Pulitzer, the American Book Award, the Modern Language Association Commonwealth Award, and the National Medal of Arts. Her story "Why I Live at the P.O." also inspired the developer of a popular email program to name his software after her. At the time of her death, Welty was considered by many to be the South's greatest living writer.

WELTY WEB ARCHIVE

[4672] Conrad A. Albrizio, *The New Deal* (1934), courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (NLR). A fresco of New York's Leonardo Da Vinci Art School. Showing working people, the mural was dedicated to President Roosevelt and commissioned by the WPA. Work was an important theme in depression-era art.

[5169] Ben Shahn, *Two Women Walking along Street, Natchez, Mississippi* (1935), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-006093-M4 DLC]. Eudora Welty was born into a family of means in Mississippi in 1909 and resided there for most of her life. Welty rooted much of her work in the daily life of small southern towns.

[5524] Dorothea Lange, *White Sharecropper Family, Formerly Mill Workers in the Gastonia Textile Mills. When the Mills Closed Down Seven Years Ago, They Came to This Farm Near Hartwell, Georgia* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-018147-CDLC]. The less glamorous side of rural southern life; a white sharecropping family seated on the porch of their cabin. This family is an example of the poorer, "everyday people" that writers such as William Faulkner and Eudora Welty focused on in their work.

TEACHING TIPS

■ "Petrified Man" is narrated by an omniscient, third-person voice—a voice outside the story which refers to the characters as "he," "she," etc. How does this outside narrator depict Leota and Mrs. Fletcher? Since the story is primarily dialogue, it should be relatively easy for your students to pick out the narrator's descriptions of the characters. Have them list those descriptions, focusing on the adjectives applied to each character. Using these lists, ask your students to describe how the narrator seems to view these characters. How does this narrative voice affect our overall impression of the story?

■ In *The Eye of the Story*, a collection of her essays and reviews, Welty wrote that "a fiction writer's responsibility covers not only what he presents as the facts of a given story but what he chooses to stir up as their implications; in the end, these implications, too, become facts, in the larger, fictional sense. But it is not all right, not in good faith, for things *not* to mean what they say." Discuss Welty's comments with your students in the context of "Petrified Man." Using the chalkboard or an overhead projector, work with the class to produce two lists. One list should include the "facts" of the story; the other should include the "lies" of the story. What role do the "lies" serve for Leota? Does Mrs. Fletcher really believe them?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What kind of relationship do Leota and Mrs. Fletcher seem to have? Describe these two characters. What kind of people are Leota and Mrs. Fletcher? Where does each of them live? How does each woman spend her day? How do they think of themselves? How do they seem to perceive each other? What specific clues does the text give us to help answer these questions?

Context: Like many other southern authors, Welty was greatly influenced by southern oral traditions. In "Losing Battles," for example, Welty attempted to write an entire narrative comprised solely of her characters' dialogue with one another. Think about the kinds of stories Leota tells, and compare those with, for example, the stories in

Zora Neale Hurston's *Eatonville Anthology*. What do the stories have in common? How do they differ? What does such a comparison suggest about southern oral traditions?

Exploration: Like many of the writers in Unit 8, (as well as many of the writers included under the category of the Southern Renaissance), Welty is often considered a **regional** writer because she writes almost exclusively about a particular geographic area, and that location seems to greatly determine her plots and characters. While this might be a useful way for literary scholars to group authors, it also risks reducing authors to a label that does not adequately describe their work. Consider the types of writing you've read that are grouped under the category of "regionalism." What are the pros and cons of such a label? What does such a label assume about literature? How might it be used by scholars to construct or manipulate the American literary canon? How does the South of Twain, Chopin, and Chesnutt differ from that of Welty and the Southern Agrarians?

Tennessee Williams (1911–1983)

"A morbid shyness once prevented me from having much direct communication with people," Tennessee Williams wrote, "and possibly that is why I began to write them plays and stories." Considered by many to be America's greatest playwright, Thomas Lanier Williams III was born in Columbus, Mississippi. Though some critics see Williams's work as overly obsessed with "perversion"—murder, rape, incest, and nymphomania—Williams's characters inhabit a world as emotionally unstable as their author's. Williams's mother, Edwina, was a southern belle who, despite enduring a lifetime of emotional and physical abuse from her husband, was a strong anchor for Williams and protected him from his father in his youth. Williams's father, CC, was a traveling salesman and an alcoholic with whom Williams was never close.

Williams was forever marked by the alienation and psychological pain of his childhood. After he flunked ROTC, his father forced him to drop out of the University of Missouri and got him a job in his shoe company's warehouse. Williams wrote furiously by night, but after three years the pressure of the factory work resulted in his first nervous breakdown, in 1935. Not long afterward, his beloved but reclusive sister, Rose, suffered a mental breakdown so devastating that their mother signed the papers to give her a prefrontal lobotomy. Williams changed his name to "Tennessee" while living in New Orleans, where he continued to write. During this period he also continued to explore his sexual attraction to men, which he'd discovered while finishing his undergraduate degree at the University of Iowa. Recognizing his homosexuality deepened a belief Williams had formed while watching his sister's slow decline—that the pressure to conform to the American mainstream could be a powerful and dangerous force. After producing several plays in local theaters, Williams enjoyed his first big success with *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and followed it up with such power-

[7282] Dorothea Lange, *Antebellum Plantation House in Greene County, Georgia* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-017941-C DLC].

ful plays as the Pulitzer Prize–winning *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955). Other plays include *The Rose Tattoo* (1950), *Camino Real* (1953), and *The Night of the Iguana* (1961).

Although he continued writing throughout his life, by the early 1960s, Williams had already produced his greatest work. The death of his longtime companion, Frank Merlo, in 1963, as well as Williams's continued abuse of alcohol and sleeping pills, forced Williams into a decline from which he never fully recovered. Williams wrote several more plays in the 1970s, including *Out Cry* (1971) and *Small Craft Warnings* (1972). He died after choking on the cap of a medicine bottle in a New York hotel room.

TEACHING TIPS

■ Have your students choose parts and stage an impromptu performance of the first scene in *A Streetcar Named Desire* to give them some idea of the difficulties involved with dramatic readings and to show them how performance can change their impression of a play. This will work best if your students have time to prepare, but it can also be done "cold." Students generally enjoy dramatic readings, and Scene One sets out the major issues of the play, introduces all the main characters, and is a great way to begin a more general discussion of *Streetcar*.

■ Blanche and Stanley can be problematic characters, and student responses to *A Streetcar Named Desire* can sometimes be polarized by their reaction to either Stanley or Blanche. One way to deal with this is to ask students to focus on the characters independently. After you've polled them for initial reactions, divide your students into several groups. Ask half of the groups to describe Stanley and assess his pros and cons as a character; meanwhile, ask the other half of the groups to do the same with Blanche. You might provide your groups with some of the more common assessments of each character: Is Stanley a caged animal whose sexuality is so "natural" that his violence is somehow excusable or understandable? Or does he represent a patriarchal authority and social order that are threatened by the changing social mores of the 1950s? Is Blanche a representative of the Old South, of tradition and idealism, and as such a dying breed? Or is her struggle to come to terms with a reality that does not match her desires a more universal struggle that we all must face? Is the conflict between Stanley and Blanche one between the working class and a dying southern aristocracy? These are not, of course, the only ways to interpret Stanley and Blanche, nor are they mutually exclusive; however, they should provide a good basis for discussion and provoke your students to move beyond their "gut" reactions to these characters.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Who seems to be the protagonist in *A Streetcar Named Desire*? With whom do you sympathize?

Context: In light of Williams's homosexuality, it might be tempting to see the violence in Stanley Kowalski's interactions with Stella and Blanche as a critique of the strict heterosexual norms Williams had seen and experienced in his lifetime. However, the 1950s were a period of social repression in more ways than one, and *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a play that addresses multiple levels of 1950s culture. Besides sexuality, what other social norms might the play be attempting to address?

Context: Nearly thirty years before the debut of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the American South was outraged by national press coverage of the Scopes evolution trial, which depicted the South as backward, hidebound, and repressed. The Southern Agrarian movement developed partially as a response to this experience and was an attempt by the writers involved to defend southern values and ways of life. How do you think the Southern Agrarians would have responded to *A Streetcar Named Desire*? How had the United States changed in the thirty years between the Scopes trial and the debut of Williams's play? Consider both the critical and the popular responses to the play.

Exploration: In describing the main character of his most successful play, *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller said that in Willy Loman, "the past was as alive as what was happening at the moment, sometimes even crashing in to completely overwhelm his mind" (see Unit 14). Miller's description of Willy Loman could also describe Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as she struggles to move beyond her past and the loss of Belle Reve. Why do you think two of the most important American plays of the twentieth century would be so concerned about the relation of the past to the present or the future? Consider this question in the larger context of the other southern writers in this unit: Which authors and works also seem centrally concerned with the way the past relates to the present, and why is this preoccupation so common to southern writers?

WILLIAMS WEB ARCHIVE

[5170] Marion Post Walcott, *Saturday Afternoon, Clarksdale, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-030640-M3 DLC]. Urban scene with African American men, cars, and storefronts. Blanche Cutrer, who was used by Tennessee Williams as a model for Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, lived in Clarksdale.

[5368] Carl Van Vechten, *Portrait of Marlon Brando, in* A Streetcar Named Desire (1948), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-116613]. Tennessee Williams won the Pulitzer Prize for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). Marlon Brando starred as the sexual and brutal Stanley Kowalski in the Broadway version and in the censored 1951 movie co-starring Vivien Leigh.

[7282] Dorothea Lange, *Antebellum Plantation House in Greene County, Georgia* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-017941-C DLC]. Neoclassical pillars and porch of large plantation house. The "plantation myth" exemplifies ideas about the Old South's benevolent, paternalistic institutions and traditions.

[7497] Walter Albertin, *Tennessee Williams, Full-length Portrait, Walking, at Service for Dylan Thomas, Facing Front* (1953), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-115075]. Known to incorporate themes of alienation and pain in his work, Williams wrote a number of well-known plays, including *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

Flannery O'Connor (1925–1965)

Mary Flannery O'Connor was born in Savannah, Georgia, the daughter of devout Catholic parents of good social standing. She was educated at parochial schools in Savannah until 1938, when her father was diagnosed with lupus, a degenerative blood disease of which he died two years later. During her father's last years, the O'Connor family moved to Milledgeville, Georgia, where O'Connor would spend most of the rest of her life living with her mother. After finishing high school, O'Connor earned a degree in social science from a local college. In 1945, on the recommendation of one of her professors, she earned a fellowship to attend the Writer's Workshop of the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa), where she met John Crowe Ransom. During the next two years, O'Connor honed her skills as one of America's most distinguished writers of short stories. Her

[7303] Joe McTyre, *Flannery O'Connor* (c. 1955), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-108013].

first publication came with *Geranium* in 1946, followed by her first novel, *Wise Blood,* in 1952. *The Habit of Being* (1979) is a collection of O'Connor's letters.

Although she went on to publish a second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), O'Connor is best known for her short stories, which are marked by their dark humor, masterful use of dialogue, and sometimes aggressive anti-sentimentalism. O'Connor's rural southern characters have been described as "repugnant, contemptible, and grotesque." But while deluded and deceitful characters like Tom T. Shiftlet in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" or Hulga and Joy Hopewell in "Good Country People" are not necessarily likable, O'Connor deftly captures them in moments where they seem on the verge of realizing their deepest flaws. By showing the pain her characters feel as a result of their own shortcomings, O'Connor almost seems to suggest they deserve our pity as much as our scorn; yet she tends to leave them—and us—hanging just a moment before we can be sure.

O'Connor was diagnosed with lupus—the same disease that had killed her father—in December 1950. She continued to write for the next fourteen years and worked feverishly in the final weeks of her life to finish her second short-story collection, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, before her death at the age of thirty-nine.

TEACHING TIPS

■ In *Mystery and Manners* O'Connor describes "Good Country People" as a story in which "a lady Ph.D. has her wooden leg stolen by a Bible salesman whom she has tried to seduce." Admitting that, "paraphrased this way, the situation is simply a low joke," O'Connor goes on to discuss the significance of the wooden leg as, among other things, a symbol of Hulga's wooden soul and emotional disability. "As the story goes on," O'Connor continues, "the wooden leg continues to accumulate meaning. The reader learns how the girl feels about it; and finally, by the time the Bible salesman comes along, the leg has accumulated so much meaning that it is, as the saying goes, loaded. And when the Bible salesman steals it, the reader realizes that he has taken away part of the girl's personality and has revealed her deeper affliction to her for the first time." Begin your discussion of the story by asking your students to think about O'Connor's simple paraphrase; then use that discussion to open up the multiple layers of meaning within the story.

■ The title of "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" comes from a warning to drivers that they should drive carefully. "Good Country People" begins with a description of Mrs. Freeman that characterizes her as very much like a car with three gears—neutral, forward, and reverse. Ask your students to think about O'Connor's apparent preoccupation with automobiles and travel. How might such references relate to the development of the federal highway system in the 1950s? What do these stories seem to be saying about an increasingly mobile population?

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What is the significance of the names of O'Connor's characters such as Tom T. Shiftlet, Mrs. Hopewell, or Mrs. Freeman? Why might O'Connor name her characters in this way?

Comprehension: What is the role of the Freemans in "Good Country People"? Why does Mrs. Hopewell "keep" them? What does that mean?

Context: In the opening scene of "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," Tom T. Shiftlet says, "Lady, people don't care how they lie. Maybe the best I can tell you is, I'm a man; but listen lady . . . what is a man?" Why does Shiftlet ask such a question? Shiftlet also talks about the doctor who cuts out human hearts, denies he has any concern for money, and is unmistakably preoccupied with the car in the garage. What might these references symbolize? How do these aspects of Shiftlet's character relate to the changing South in the 1930s?

Exploration: In an essay entitled "Writing Short Stories" (from the collection *Mystery and Manners*), O'Connor wrote that "the great advantage of being a southern writer is that we don't have to go anywhere to look for manners; bad or good, we've got them in abundance. We in the South live in a society that is rich in contradiction, rich in irony, rich in contrast, and particularly rich in its speech." How does O'Connor make use of the richness of the South as she identifies it here? Do other southern writers seem to share O'Connor's assessment of the South, or do they portray it as something different?

O'CONNOR WEB ARCHIVE

[3314] Anonymous, *Flannery O'Connor*, courtesy of Georgia State University Library. Flannery O'Connor was well known for her short stories and their dark sense of humor, dialogue, and rejection of sentimentalism.

[7303] Joe McTyre, *Flannery O'Connor* (c. 1955), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-108013]. Diagnosed with lupus in 1950, Flannery O'Connor continued to write for fourteen years. Her short story "Good Country People" (1955) represents O'Connor's unflinching and anti-sentimental take on physical disabilities.

Suggested Author Pairings

ZORA NEALE HURSTON, RICHARD WRIGHT, AND FLANNERY O'CONNOR

In the first half of the twentieth century, the increased mobility enabled by the spread of automobiles and good roads led to frequent collisions between the slow, trusting, tradition-bound way of life found in rural communities and the faster, more ruthless, and often more deceitful behavior found in the wider world. Such collisions form the basis of stories by Hurston, Wright, and O'Connor. In "The Gilded Six-Bits," the idyllic and childlike simplicity of Joe and Missie May's life together is nearly destroyed by the appearance of "Mister Otis D. Slemmons, of spots and places—Memphis, Chicago, Jacksonville, Philadelphia and so on." Something similar happens in O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," although O'Connor is much less clear about the ultimate consequences of Tom T. Shiftlet's arrival and eventual departure from the Carter's house. Did the older Lucynell Carter secretly want to be rid of her disabled daughter? (She was, after all, "ravenous for a son-in-law.") The ultimate effects of the wider world are nearly as ambiguous in Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man." However, the fact that Dave first tries to get a gun through the Sears catalog marks the gun itself as something of an outsider, and it

definitely destroys the life Dave has previously lived. As Dave hops the train "away to somewhere," we're left to wonder whether the end of his encounter with the wider world will be as unsuccessful as its beginning.

WILLIAM FAULKNER, FLANNERY O'CONNOR, AND TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

A great deal of writing by southern authors could be described as "gothic" in that many attempted in their writing to "unsettle" what they saw as prevailing trends in their society. However, these three writers each use gothic elements to special effect. Faulkner is generally considered a master of the southern gothic form and is often compared to Nathaniel Hawthorne for his dark and mysterious settings and for the way his writing explores the sin and guilt in the hearts of his characters and their world. While O'Connor's stories seem on the surface much less dark than Faulkner's, they are nearly always peopled with bizarre and even grotesque characters whose physical disabilities often symbolize their inner failings. With characters like Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski, Williams's use of the gothic form falls somewhere between Faulkner and O'Connor, though toward the more deeply sinister end of the spectrum. But despite the different methods each author uses to explore the darker and more twisted sides of human nature and experience, each is concerned with how past mistakes develop into present imperfections and shape the possibilities for the future.

JOHN CROWE RANSOM, TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, AND KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

The struggle between myth and reality plays a prominent role in the work of these writers. In his contribution to the Southern Agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, Ransom argued that myths, such as the romantic vision of the Old South, are necessary to hold a society together. Later, he argued for poetry as occupying the same role; by providing an alternative source of knowledge, poetry could challenge dominant beliefs and help society hold on to what it valued most. In *A Streetcar Named Desire,* Blanche struggles to accept that the reality of her life does not match any of the myths she was taught to believe about how life should be. And in Porter's "Flowering Judas," Laura seems to occupy a mythical space somewhere between revolutionary and southern belle, even as she must learn to accept the fact that her ideal of the revolutionary ("a revolutionist should be lean, animated by heroic faith, a vessel of abstract virtues") does not match the reality she finds in Braggioni. Many southern writers in this period address similar questions about the disillusionment produced by the conflict between their ideals and the reality in which they find themselves.

CORE CONTEXTS

Taking a Stand: The Southern Agrarians Respond to a Changing World

Many of the most prominent American writers of the early twentieth century responded to the social and cultural upheavals of the period by rebelling against them; however, that rebellion often took vastly different, even contradictory, forms. For example, one of the most influential literary rebellions of the period was that of the group of literary modernists who became known as the "Lost Generation," partially due to the fact that many of them were permanent or temporary expatriates. These writers left the United States because they found it lacking in the traditions and cultural richness they felt their creative lives required. Writing mostly from London and Paris in the 1910s and 1920s, modernists like Gertrude Stein, H. D., Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot experimented with new literary forms as they expressed despair and often cynicism about the course American culture seemed to be taking. As critic Lynn Dumenil has noted, "A theme that historians have called the **revolt against the village** pervaded the literature of the twenties. Both the young members of the Lost Generation and an older cadre of writers inveighed against the crudeness, materialism, and repression of their own society."

But while the Lost Generation often dominates literary histories of the era, theirs was not the only literary rebellion against changes in the "modern" world. At about the same time, a small group of critics and poets gathered in the South to challenge both the cynicism of the literary modernists and the more general "revolt against the village" in American culture. Because they praised the agrarian way of life in the South, this group became known as the Southern Agrarians.

[5224] Dorothea Lange, *White Sharecropper Family, Hartwell, Georgia* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-018147-C DLC].

Centered around Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, these poets and critics—including John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren—first gained a degree of prominence for *The Fugitive*, the magazine they published from 1922 to 1925 as an outlet for their writing. According to critic J. A. Bryant, the group's goal as "the Fugitive poets" was simply to "demonstrate that a group of southerners could produce important work in the medium, devoid of sentimentality and carefully crafted, with special attention to the logical coherence of substance and trope."

The Fugitives' resistance to a great many prevailing social trends was catalyzed by the Scopes evolution trial, which took place in 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee. The trial (dramatized in the play *Inherit the Wind* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee) pitted John Thomas Scopes, a young science teacher from Dayton who had dared to teach Darwin's theories of evolution in his science class, against the State of

[5158] Ben Shahn, *Men Loafing in Crossville, Tennessee* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-006224-M4 DLC].

[3347] Dorothea Lange, *Power Farming Displaces Tenants. Childress County, Texas Panhandle* (1938), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-T01-018281-C DLC].

Tennessee, which (with the support of the Ku Klux Klan) had recently passed a law forbidding the teaching of "any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible." Much more than a battle over classroom policy, for many southerners the Scopes trial came to symbolize the clash between religious fundamentalism and modernism, between tradition and change, and between rural and urban ways of life. Although Scopes lost the case, many in the South—especially the writers who were to become the Southern Agrarians—were incensed at the media coverage of the trial, which portrayed the South as an ignorant backwater populated by "yokels" and "bigots."

In 1930, partially as a response to the Scopes trial, but also as an expression of their longstanding resentment against the North, the Southern Agrarians produced a manifesto called *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* by "Twelve Southerners." This collection of essays—whose title played on the defiance of the southern anthem "Dixie"—promoted traditional southern values and an agrarian way of life as an alternative to the course of the modern, industrial life they saw developing in the North. With essays by Ransom, Tate, and Warren, as well as contributions from Donald Davidson, John Gould Fletcher, Henry Blue Kline, Lyle Lanier, Andrew Lytle, H. C. Nixon, Frank Owsley, John Donald Wade, and Stark Young, the manifesto questioned the very definition of "progress" by asking: Progress toward what? According to the volume's introductory "Statement of Principles" (written by Ransom), those who advocated building a "New South" on the northern model "must come back to the support of the southern tradition." Industrial society, they claimed, was soulless and alienating, and besides, it caused more problems than it solved.

Citing "overproduction, unemployment, and a growing inequality in the distribution of wealth" as just a few of the "evils that follow in the wake of machines," the Agrarians condemned not only the means by which a new consumer culture was being built, but also consumption itself. "We have been deceived" by consumption, they wrote. "We have more time in which to consume, and many more products to be consumed. But the tempo of our labors communicates itself to our satisfactions, and these also have become brutal and hurried." What's more, they claimed, industrial society obscures "the God of nature" and makes it impossible for either religion or art to flourish. In short, the Agrarians expressed what critic Lynn Dumenil calls a dominant theme of the period—namely, despair at "the erosion of community and personal autonomy in the face of an increasingly nationalized and organized society."

"Opposed to the industrial society is the agrarian," they wrote, "which does not stand in particular need of definition." One of the reasons for the Agrarians' evasiveness about precisely what should replace the industrial model of progress was that they were a disparate

group who could not always agree on exactly what "the South" was or should be. Critics have noted that one of the things hidden in the Agrarians' lack of a specific plan for social reorganization is the underlying racism of the bulk of the essays in *I'll Take My Stand*. All twelve of the book's authors were white men, and their implicit advocacy of white supremacy is one of the reasons their attempt to establish a new cultural and literary movement has often been dismissed as simply a romantic and nostalgic attempt to return to a corrupt past. Critics remain divided about the value of the Agrarians' advocacy of an alternative in which land and other resources would be more equally distributed among the "plain (white) folk" around whom much of southern mythology revolved. Whatever their hopes might have been for leading the South in a new direction, the Agrarians' manifesto was never a big seller. Nevertheless, their work represents an important voice in the development of the South and southern literature.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What did the Agrarians want? What did they value?

Comprehension: What did the Agrarians dislike about "modern" life?

Comprehension: What was at stake in the Scopes evolution trial and how did the trial affect the South?

Context: How did the period of Reconstruction following the Civil War shape southern attitudes toward the North and the notion of "progress"?

Context: What did advocates for the "New South" hope to achieve? How do you see these aspirations reflected in the poetry of John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren?

Context: Why do you think some southerners felt threatened by the development of consumer culture? How does the *Birth of a Nation* advertisement from the archive [5703] relate to the Agrarians' fears about a consumer society?

Exploration: Consider *As I Lay Dying*. How does Faulkner relate to the Agrarians? Does his writing express nostalgia for the past or suggest that the South should move in a different direction?

Exploration: Some critics believe that if the white supremacist argument is removed from the Southern Agrarian agenda, what remains does not seem so different from other calls for reorganizing society in more just ways. For example, how does the Agrarians' agenda compare with the activities of U.S. labor movements during this period?

Exploration: Both the Agrarians and the writers of the "Lost Generation" (many of whom are covered in Unit 11) protested what they saw as the prevailing trends in American life. How were their protests similar? How did they differ? How do their concerns relate to modernism more generally?

"TAKING A STAND" WEB ARCHIVE

[3347] Dorothea Lange, *Power Farming Displaces Tenants. Childress County, Texas Panhandle* (1938), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-T01-018281-C DLC]. Alternately titled "Tractored Out." Mechanization made large farmowners wealthy, but left small farmers, tenants, and sharecroppers without jobs. The rising use of technology, coupled with drought and falling crop prices during the Great Depression, left many farmers homeless and out of work.

[5158] Ben Shahn, *Men Loafing in Crossville, Tennessee* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-006224-M4 DLC]. Men seated outside storefront in rural Tennessee. Unemployment was widespread during the Great Depression. Eventually, New Deal programs like the Civil Conservation Corps (CCC) put many men back to work on national projects such as road building and maintenance in the National Parks System.

[5224] Dorothea Lange, *White Sharecropper Family, Formerly Mill Workers in the Gastonia Textile Mills. When the Mills Closed Down Seven Years Ago, They Came to This Farm near Hartwell, Georgia* (1937), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-018147-C DLC]. The less glamorous side of rural southern life; a white sharecropping family seated on the porch of their cabin. This family is an example of the poorer, "everyday people" that southern writers such as William Faulkner and Eudora Welty focused on in their work.

[5703] Riverside Printing Co., *Elliot & Sherman Film Corp Present D. W. Griffith's 8th Wonder of the World* The Birth of a Nation (1915), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-1971]. Advertising poster for Griffith's film adaptation of Thomas Dixon's novel, *Birth of a Nation*. The film was technically innovative but extremely racist. Civil rights groups such as the NAACP organized protests against the film, which glorified and promoted the Ku Klux Klan.

Separate Is Not Equal: Enforcing the Codes of the Jim Crow South

Although the Civil War *officially* settled the status of African Americans as free individuals, many Americans—especially in the South—remained unconvinced even decades later. In the immediate chaos following the war, southern whites gradually assumed the responsibility of governing the former confederate states, taking as their greatest immediate concern the problem of controlling the four million former slaves. To this end, southern states quickly began enacting Black Codes which (like the antebellum Slave Codes that had preceded them) attempted to control the lives of African Americans in virtually every aspect. These repressive laws, as well as the southern states' refusal to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment (which provided equal protection to African Americans under the law), helped convince Congress that it needed to intervene in the process of rebuilding the South. However, the short period of Radical Reconstruction that followed (during which federal mandates enabled African Americans to vote and be elected as legislators and governors in the former confederate states) only further infuriated white southerners, making them more determined than ever to reestablish white supremacy in what they saw as their territory. Secret societies, such as the Knights of the White Camelia and the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, flourished in the decade following the war. For members of these groups, depriving African Americans of political equality was a holy crusade, and they were willing to use any amount of force and intimidation (including whippings, beatings, arson, and murder) to ensure victory for their cause.

[2256] Russell Lee, *Negro Drinking at "Colored" Water Cooler in Streetcar Terminal, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-80126].

By 1876, the experiments of Reconstruction had largely ended and the southern states had returned to white control. Southern leaders moved quickly to establish elaborate election codes—usually involving poll taxes and literacy tests—to disenfranchise African Americans. By removing African Americans from the political sphere, southern whites were free to do as they pleased, and they vowed to keep the races completely separate. To that end, Tennessee passed the first law against intermarriage of the races in 1870, and it adopted the first "Jim Crow" law five years later. The rest of the South quickly followed suit.

[3355] Jack Delano, *At the Bus Station in Durham, North Carolina* (1940), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection [LC-USF33-020522-MZ].

Little more than updates to the post–Civil War Black Codes, "Jim Crow" laws got their name from one of the stock characters in the minstrel shows that were a mainstay of popular entertainment throughout the nineteenth century. Such shows popularized and reinforced the pervasive stereotypes of blacks as lazy, stupid, somehow less human, and inferior to whites. Thus, as the name suggests, Jim Crow was much more than a rigorous code of anti-black laws; it was also a way of life designed to reinforce the idea that whites were superior to blacks in all important ways. While the laws segregated schools, transportation, public buildings and almost every conceivable aspect of society, Jim Crow etiquette strictly regulated every possible interaction between blacks and whites, demanding, for example, that white

motorists be given the right-of-way at all intersections and that a black man should avoid even looking at a white woman if at all possible. In 1896, in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court ruled that the "separate but equal" ideology was entirely legal; it would be more than fifty years before that ideology was legally overturned.

African Americans who failed to abide by the rules of Jim Crow were dealt with severely. As Richard Wright recounts in "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," when he dared throw rocks at a group of white boys who were taunting him, his mother beat him and "finished by telling me that I ought to be thankful to God as long as I lived that they didn't kill me." Wright's mother had good reason to give her son such a stern warning; if Jim Crow laws or etiquette were threatened or broken, violence was almost sure to follow. Vigilante white supremacist groups like the KKK needed very little encouragement to attack, and outbreaks of mob violence became a regular occurrence throughout the South.

The 3,446 lynchings of black men and women recorded between 1882 and 1969 are a stark measure of the degree to which vigilantism shaped race relations in the decades following Reconstruction. But even when the legal system was able to stop the summary justice of impassioned mobs, white supremacy often made it impossible for African Americans who were accused of crimes to get a fair trial. Such was the case with the so-called "Scottsboro Boys"—nine African American youths accused in 1931 of raping two white women one night after all of them had hopped aboard an Alabama train. Despite the lack of any physical evidence that the women had actually been harmed, eight of the nine defendants received death sentences (a mistrial was declared in the case of twelve-year-old defendant Roy Wright because the jury was split on whether to give him death or life in prison). Although the verdicts were affirmed by the Alabama Supreme Court, they were overturned by the United States Supreme Court, which said the defendants had not received competent counsel. In the multiple retrials that followed, Alabama courts continued to find the defendants guilty, despite growing evidence that the crimes had never, in fact, taken place. By 1936, the trials of the Scottsboro Boys had attracted so much attention that to some observers the case had become *The White People of Alabama v. The Rest of the World*. Although all of the defendants were eventually released, paroled, or had escaped from prison in Alabama, all had spent years in jail for a crime that most likely never happened. For many Americans, the case became a reminder of the deep prejudice that divided the South far into the twentieth century.

[9071] Anonymous, *Ku Klux Klan Parade, Washington, D.C., on Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.* (1926), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-59666].

Thanks in part to prominent cases like those of the Scottsboro Boys, the ideology of Jim Crow was finally declared illegal by the land-

"SEPARATE IS NOT EQUAL" WEB ARCHIVE

[2256] Russell Lee, *Negro Drinking at "Colored" Water Cooler in Streetcar Terminal, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-80126]. Jim Crow laws divided public facilities of many kinds throughout the South. Supposedly based on the "separate but equal" Supreme Court ruling, these divisions limited African Americans' access to many resources.

[3035] Anonymous, *Newspaper Headline: President Truman Wipes Out Segregation in Armed Forces* (1948), courtesy of the Library of Congress [microfilm 1057]. After Truman's executive order eliminated segregation in the military, many African American veterans of World War II became local leaders in civil rights struggles in the South.

[3355] Jack Delano, *At the Bus Station in Durham, North Carolina* (1940), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection [LC-USF33-020522-M2]. African American man in a segregated waiting room at bus station. Jim Crow laws severely divided the experiences of whites and African Americans in the South.

[3696] Dorothea Lange, *Plantation Overseer. Mississippi Delta, Near Clarksdale, Mississippi* (1936), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-009596-C DLC]. Sharecropping initially appealed to freedmen because it promised benefits they had previously been denied; however, the vast majority of sharecroppers worked in conditions that weren't much better than slavery.

[3933] Thomas Nast, *Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction and How It Works* (1866), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-4591]. Cartoon depicting Andrew Johnson as Shakespeare's Iago betraying Othello, who represents African American Civil War veterans. Southerner Andrew Johnson, seventeenth President of the United States, took office after Lincoln's assassination. His notoriously racist politics thwarted processes of legal change and compensation to African Americans during Reconstruction.

mark 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education,* which legally ended segregation in U.S. public schools, beginning a trend toward greater equality in other aspects of race relations as well.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: What was the role of the U.S. government in the Reconstruction of the South after the Civil War?

Comprehension: What is vigilantism?

Comprehension: How did white southerners justify Jim Crow laws and etiquette?

Context: In her groundbreaking article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," feminist theorist Laura Mulvey argues that film often employs a "male gaze": that is, films tend to be characterized by *scopophilia*—the pleasure involved in looking at other people's bodies as erotic objects. Although Mulvey is primarily concerned with the eroticization of women, people of color are also often objects of fetishization and domination in American literature; for, as the Scottsboro trials revealed, in the South sexual pleasure was always drawn upon racial lines during this era. For Mulvey visual pleasure is dependent upon an *objectification* of female characters and a narcissistic process of *identification* with an "ideal ego" seen on the screen. To what extent do the writers of the Southern Renaissance, particularly Faulkner, rely upon an objectification of either women or African Americans? Who is the "ideal ego" of these works? What does this imply about the authority and identity of the ideal reader?

Context: Explain how the Jim Crow laws could be considered legal under the Fourteenth Amendment (which guaranteed African Americans equal protection under the law). What view of segregation does Zora Neale Hurston take in her depiction of Eatonville, Florida? How does this compare to the depiction of southern segregation in photos taken by white photographers from this era?

Context: How does the Jim Crow way of life affect Dave in Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man"?

Context: How was the Southern Agrarian literary movement related to the Jim Crow way of life?

Exploration: What does Zora Neale Hurston's essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" say about the white supremacy that was at the heart of the Jim Crow South? How does her vision of black-white relations compare to Harriet Jacobs's over fifty years earlier (Unit 7)?

Exploration: As the case of the Scottsboro Boys illustrates, African Americans in the Jim Crow South could end up in serious trouble just for being in the same place with whites at the wrong time. Do you think this is why Zora Neale Hurston's stories rarely include white characters? Consider the advantages and disadvantages of Hurston's approach to depicting race relations. How does Hurston's treatment of white characters compare to the work of other Harlem Renaissance writers such as Nella Larsen, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Jean Toomer?

Exploration: Some of the most influential writing in the decades lead-

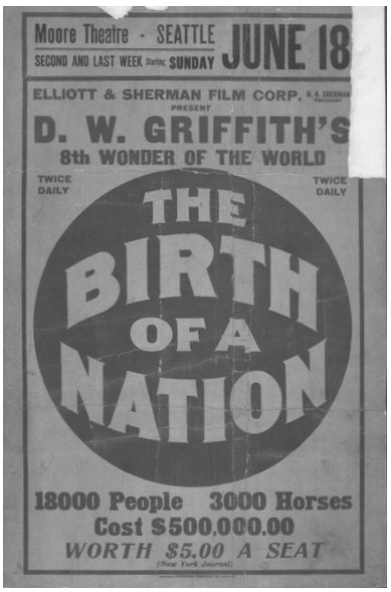
ing up to the Civil War was published by former slaves and abolitionists. Writers like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe saw the evils of slavery and worked tirelessly to end it (see Unit 7). However, as the history of Jim Crow laws shows, the work of abolishing slavery was only the beginning of a long process to confront the racism in American culture. That process was continued in the early twentieth century by prominent figures like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois (see Unit 9). Consider the context of the Jim Crow laws and the different ways these writers responded to their social conditions: How did racism change in America from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth century? How did the literary response to racism change in the same period?

Mass Culture Invasion: The Rise of Motion Pictures

In New York City, on April 23, 1896, Thomas Edison projected the first motion picture on a public screen in the United States. At the time, few foresaw the dramatic effects motion pictures would come to have on American culture in the coming decades. Beginning as a technological novelty, motion pictures soon became popular attractions in amusement parks, music halls, traveling fairs, wax museums, and vaudeville houses all over the country (and in other countries around the world). This upstart entertainment had a tough time competing, however, against the traditional stage arts that were considered to be of higher quality, and therefore appropriate for a higher economic and social class. It wasn't until the 1910s that film began to be taken seriously as many performance houses—formerly devoted exclusively to live drama—converted to present a mixed bill of motion pictures and live performance or abandoned live performance altogether in favor of film. With the rise of the star system during this same period (driven by the popularity of actors like Mary Pickford, Sarah Bernhardt, and Charlie Chaplin), motion pictures became an increasingly powerful force in American life. Although most of the major Hollywood motion picture studios would not be established until the mid-1920s, the motion picture was here to stay.

Along with broadcast radio and nationally circulated publications, motion pictures formed a large part of an ever-expanding "mass culture"—a culture consisting largely of standardized, mass-produced, and mass-distributed cultural products that included everything from movies to toothbrushes, and which meant that no matter where you traveled in the United States, you were likely to be able to find familiar products and entertainment. The rapid expansion of this mass culture formed a challenge to traditions of regional isolation and autonomy. In the South, the introduction of motion pictures into everyday life was fraught with controversy; therefore, the debates surrounding motion pictures often revealed a deeper and more pervasive anxiety about moral and social decay and offered, in some communities, a point around which conservative and "traditional" forces could rally. Many were quick to see that, while motion pictures offered new and

[4554] Prentiss Taylor, *Scottsboro Limited* (1931), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-4717]. Lithograph from *Scottsboro Limited*, a collection including four poems and a play by Langston Hughes. The collection protested the incarceration, conviction, and death sentence of the Scottsboro boys, nine African American youths unjustly accused of raping two white women.
[7652] Anonymous, *Jim Crow Jubilee* (1847), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-37348]. Jim Crow laws took their name from a character in minstrel shows. The shows and the character showcased racist stereotypes about African Americans, depicting them as lazy and less intelligent than whites.
[9071] Anonymous, Ku Klux Klan Parade, Washington, D.C., on Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. (1926), courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division [LC-USZ62-59666]. This photograph of a huge KKK march on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., illustrates the mainstream acceptance of the group in the 1920s and 1930s. The Ku Klux Klan, organized under the guise of a civic organization, enforced Jim Crow laws and white supremacy with intimidation and violence. The group regained popular support after the release of *Birth of a Nation*.



[5703] Riverside Printing Company, *Elliot & Sherman Film Corp. present D. W. Griffith's 8th Wonder of the World, "The Birth of a Nation"* (1915), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-1971].

unprecedented means by which to shape public opinion and teach the "right" values and behaviors, the medium was equally capable of teaching values a community didn't like. According to historian Gregory A. Waller, "The danger, of course, was that this powerful pedagogic tool would be (or had been) utterly prostituted in the name of profit and cheap amusement."

Many of these anxieties about the rise of mass culture—in the nation as a whole, but especially in the South—coalesced around D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, which premiered in 1915. According to Russell Merritt, whose documentary "The Making of *The Birth of a Nation*" explores both the film's technical achievements and its cultural reception, *The Birth of a Nation* was "a runaway success that paved the way for the feature movie as the most widely seen mass entertainment in history up to that time."

Griffith, who directed hundreds of short films, is often credited with defining the art of the motion picture. From a technical perspective, Griffith pioneered and/or popularized many stylistic and technical innovations, including closeups, establishing shots, medium shots, and backlighting. *The Birth of a Nation* also made use of the camera to achieve other novel effects, including composed shots, camera movement, split-screens, flashbacks, fades, irises, and dissolves. Audiences were also amazed by the realism and massive scale of Griffith's Civil War scenes, the detail and accuracy of his costuming, and the compelling combination of story-telling and editing that comprised the film.

While critics agree that *The Birth of a Nation* represented many technical and formal firsts for the motion picture, the response to the story it told was much more divided. The film was based on a dramatic adaptation of Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman* (1905), which "celebrated the Ku Klux Klan as savior of the South from vengeful and vindictive blacks." Released during the fiftieth anniversary of the close of the Civil War, the film seemed calculated to revive the spirits of southerners who had begun to doubt the righteousness of the "Lost Cause." The film's opening was promoted by klansmen dressed in full KKK regalia, and the Klan, which had all but disappeared in the first decade of the twentieth century, was revived and went on to become a major political force for the next ten years. Knowing his message would be controversial, Griffith prefaced the film with "A Plea for the Art of the Motion Picture," which addressed the potential that the film might be censored and asked that it be given "the liberty to show the dark side of wrong, that we may illuminate the bright side of virtue." Not unexpectedly, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and other civil rights groups protested the film vigorously and succeeded in persuading the U.S. Supreme Court to affirm "the right of state and local agencies to exercise prior restraint and censorship of motion pic-

[3346] Marion Post Walcott, *Rex Theatre for Colored People, Leland, Mississippi Delta* (1944), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF32-052508-D].

tures." This did little, however, to damage the success of *The Birth of a Nation,* which went on to become the most popular silent movie ever made. (Woodrow Wilson even showed it in the White House.) It was revived annually through the first half of the 1920s and remained the most profitable film for over two decades before passing that title to Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937.

The controversy surrounding *The Birth of a Nation* and the film's far-reaching influence provide vivid examples of the way the growth of motion pictures—and the mass culture of which they were a part—challenged the isolated autonomy of small communities throughout the country. However, by the 1930s, the new medium had gained enough acceptance that prominent southern writers such as William Faulkner had begun to interact with Hollywood. Faulkner went to Hollywood for the first time in 1932 to work as a scriptwriter, and he returned several times in succeeding years when he needed to supplement the meager income he was making as a writer. Meanwhile, Margaret Mitchell challenged Faulkner for the title of best-known southern writer when her romantic portrait of the Old South, *Gone With the Wind* (originally published in 1936, the same year as Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*), was made into a popular film.

[5652] Ralph Barton, *Pearl White as a Dramatic Heroine* (1930), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LCPP003B-41012].

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why did traditionally isolated communities in the South object to the growing influence of motion pictures?

Comprehension: What reasons did those who attended live theater performances give for disliking motion pictures?

Context: Many communities strongly resisted Prohibition, which began in 1919. How might the cultural battle over Prohibition have been related to the controversies surrounding the spread of motion pictures?

Context: While many people in the South resisted the influences of film on their culture, Hollywood was highly influential in shaping the image of the South for the rest of the world. Films such as *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind* were wildly popular and often comprised everything non-southerners knew about the South. How do these Hollywood visions of the South compare to the South portrayed by southern writers such as the Southern Agrarians, Thomas Wolfe, or Flannery O'Connor?

Context: Motion pictures are never mentioned in Richard Wright's "The Man Who Was Almost a Man," yet the conflict at the center of that story—Dave's desire for a gun as a way to become a man—is related to the conflict surrounding motion pictures. Think about this connection and describe how it works.

Exploration: How did the growth of motion pictures relate to the growth of radio? (See Unit 10.) To what extent is film also a democratic medium?

Exploration: In its early years, the motion picture had to compete with live drama for its audience. In many respects, this competition was a battle between high and low culture. Are similar battles going

"MASS CULTURE INVASION" WEB ARCHIVE

[3346] Marion Post Walcott, *Rex Theatre for Colored People, Leland, Mississippi Delta* (1944), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF32-052508-D]. Photograph of all-black movie theater in the South. Blacks and whites attended separate theaters and other civic facilities in the South. In the North, African Americans were isolated from white audiences by more informal social codes of segregation.

[5652] Ralph Barton, *Pearl White as a Dramatic Heroine* (1930), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LCPP003B-41012]. Cartoon of woman in Roman clothing posing for movie director. The popularity of movies encouraged the growth of mass culture, leading some regionalists to worry about the erosion of southern traditions.

[5687] National Photo Company, *Margaret Gorman (Miss America 1921), and Stephen (?) Fegen Being Filmed for a Burlesque on the Burning of Rome by the Washington Producing Co.* (1922), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-119624]. Films and beauty pageants played an important role in shaping the image of the "modern" American girl. Samuel Gompers, head of the American Federation of Labor,

noted that Gorman "represents the type of womanhood America needs; strong, red-blooded, able to shoulder the responsibilities of home-making and motherhood. It is in her type that the hope of the country resides" (*New York Times*).

[5703] Riverside Printing Co., *Elliot & Sherman Film Corp Present D. W. Griffith's 8th Wonder of the World, "The Birth of a Nation"* (1915), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZC4-1971]. Advertising poster for *The Birth of a Nation*. The film was technologically innovative but racist. Glorifying the Ku Klux Klan, it was an adaptation of Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*.

[5719] Cleveland Advocate, Article: *Oppose "Birth of a Nation"* (1915), courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society. Civil rights groups, including the NAACP, organized protests against *The Birth of a Nation*. The film glorified the Ku Klux Klan and helped the organization regain strength.

[7641] Anonymous, *NAACP Members Picketing outside the Republic Theatre, New York City, to Protest the Screening of the Movie "Birth of a Nation"* (1947), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USZ62-84505]. Despite the protests of civil rights groups, *The Birth of a Nation* achieved massive popularity and even was shown in the White House.

on in our culture today? How does the divide between high and low culture relate to the battle for local control and the problems many communities had with the introduction of "mass" culture?

Exploration: The controversy surrounding *The Birth of a Nation* may not sound completely unfamiliar to you and may remind you of the controversy surrounding the use of derogatory language in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Unit 8). Are there contemporary films that have caused similar controversies? How has the debate over the role of movies in our culture changed since 1915? How has it remained the same?

EXTENDED CONTEXTS

Hitting the Road: How Automobiles and Highways Transformed American Life

In 1900, Americans rarely moved or traveled beyond a radius of a few miles from where they were born. However, the introduction and rapid adoption of the automobile as America's primary means of transportation, combined with the development and construction of reliable roads on which those cars could travel, quickly transformed the traditional rootedness and stability of American life.

The first American automobile, the *Duryea*, was produced in 1893 and was little more than a horse-drawn buggy with an engine bolted on, with a top speed of approximately 15 miles per hour. By 1900, there were only about 8,000 cars in the United States. At that time, cars were handmade and cost well over $1,000 each, making them far too expensive for all but the wealthiest of Americans. However, in 1908, Henry Ford ushered in the era of the mass-produced automobile; by using a conveyor belt to move the car frame through each stage of its assembly, Ford was able to cut hundreds of dollars from the cost of building his Model-Ts, while at the same time cutting production time for each car from a day and a half to just 93 minutes. Ford's competitors quickly copied his production methods, and by 1920 millions of cars traveled American roads.

It took a while for American roads to catch up to American cars, though. In the early 1900s, the vast majority of roads in the United States were mere dirt tracks that quickly turned to treacherous and rut-filled swamps in the rain, then froze into rough and icy ridges in the winter. Only the most courageous or foolish travelers dared to venture far beyond major cities in their automobiles. As the number of cars rapidly multiplied, state and local governments experimented with an array of paving materials and road designs. During the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), whose purpose was to create jobs for millions of unemployed Americans, and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) did much to improve America's roads. During the 1930s, WPA and CCC workers built 75,000 bridges and constructed or improved nearly 600,000 miles of public roads.

It was World War II, however, that finally convinced the U.S. government that it should do more to improve America's roads and enforce quality standards throughout the nation. As the commander of Allied forces in Europe, Dwight Eisenhower saw how Germany's *autobahn* aided its war effort by allowing it to quickly and reliably move troops, supplies, and raw materials around the country. In 1944, Congress passed the Federal-Aid Highway Act, which established uniform design criteria for all U.S. highways. Twelve years later, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 established funding for nearly 45,000 miles of paved interstate highways—the largest peacetime construction project ever undertaken. About that effort Eisenhower would later write: "Its impact on the American economy—the jobs it would produce in manufacturing and construction, the rural areas it would open up—was beyond calculation."

[5170] Marion Post Walcott, *Saturday Afternoon, Clarksdale, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-030640-M3 DLC].

Travel has always figured prominently in American literature, beginning with the Puritan trope of an errand into the wilderness and the narratives of Caveza de Vaca and other Spanish explorers to the New World. More recently, automobiles and the highway were important aspects of self-exploration and commentary in twentieth-century American literature. Writers like John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, and Zora Neale Hurston have invoked the highway as a rejection of the familiar and an embrace of the unknown. The advent of cars and other mechanized, high-speed travel has also come to represent the disconnectivity and rootlessness of society and has given voice to fears about changes brought about by technology and modernization. In contemporary Native American poetry, for example, cars are often used as metaphors for wreckage and social dislocation, illustrating one way that cars symbolize the impact of cultural exchange and the influence of technology and white culture upon migration stories and the cultures that produce them. For the writers of the Southern Renaissance, cars symbolized both progress and the possibilities of modernization as well as the threat of industrialization to more traditional practices and values.

[4835] Marion Post Walcott, *Negroes Brought in by Truck from Nearby Towns as Day Labor for Cotton Picking. Marcella Plantation, Mileston, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-030601-M4 DLC].

Together, the mass-produced automobile and a reliable and uniform system of highways reshaped America. The ability of Americans to travel and move long distances broke down cultural barriers and meant that even remote rural areas could no longer remain isolated from the larger life of the nation, and the world.

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: Why was Henry Ford's assembly line production method such an important innovation? How did it change American industry as a whole?

Context: Increased mobility and the shambles of the southern economy after the Civil War opened up many opportunities to anyone willing to exploit them. Many northerners traveled or moved to the

"HITTING THE ROAD" WEB ARCHIVE

[4733] Dorothea Lange, *Mississippi Delta, on Mississippi Highway No. 1 between Greenville and Clarksdale. Negro Laborer's Family Being Moved from Arkansas to Mississippi by White Tenant* (1938), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-018952-E DLC]. The automobile is an important trope in American literature and culture: in this image the power relations between the

workers and the tenant are reflected in their positions in the vehicle.

[4789] Arthur Rothstein, *Farm along Highway near Dickson, Tennessee* (1942), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF34-024597-D]. As highways reached rural locations, some worried that small-town and southern values and traditions would be eroded by access to travel and mass culture.

[4835] Marion Post Walcott, *Negroes Brought in by Truck from Nearby Towns as Day Labor for Cotton Picking. Marcella Plantation, Mileston, Mississippi Delta* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-030601-M4 DLC]. Cotton was an important but resource-taxing and labor-intensive crop in the South. Although the Southern Agrarians romanticized agricultural life, work on cotton plantations was difficult and rarely lucrative for African Americans.

[5170] Marion Post Walcott, *Saturday Afternoon, Clarksdale, Mississippi Delta* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-030640-M3 DLC]. A street scene in the Mississippi Delta. Older black men talking on sidewalk in downtown Clarksdale, Mississippi. Blanche Cutrer, the model for Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, was from Clarksdale.

[5594] Anonymous, *It Was Common Practice for Small Town and Country Dealers to Bring Radios Directly to Prospects and Customers Alike* (1925), courtesy of the George H. Clark Radioana Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. Photograph of dealers delivering radios from vehicle. Growth in geographical mobility and mass culture were intertwined. As travel became easier, small towns became less culturally isolated.

[6422] Detroit Publishing Co., *Highway Construction Equipment, Probably Michigan State Highway Dept., Michigan* (1915), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-D418-629]. The mass development of automobiles and reliable roads altered travel, work, and residence patterns. Automobiles and roads became laden with cultural meanings, such as freedom and adventure.

South to exploit cheap labor and an abundance of raw materials and to capitalize on the relative naïveté of the largely rural population. How are these trends manifested in Zora Neale Hurston's "The Gilded Six-Bits" and Flannery O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own"?

Exploration: How did the growing number of automobiles and the expanded and improved national highway system relate to the spread of mass culture in the early twentieth century?

Exploration: Trace the metaphors of transportation in the poetry of Joy Harjo (Unit 15) and Robert Penn Warren. What roles do cars, planes, trains, roads, and horses play in their verse?

Promises Unfulfilled: Sharecropping in the South

In the tumultuous South in the decades following the Civil War and Reconstruction, four million freedmen (former slaves) found themselves faced with choices many had scarcely imagined would ever be theirs: How should we make our way in the world? At the same time, while the war had ravaged the southern economy, that economy remained dependent on the production of cotton, which had traditionally been taken care of by slave labor in the plantation system. Therefore, southern farmers and plantation owners faced a dilemma of their own: What would replace slave labor in the southern economy?

Sharecropping was the system of tenant farming which gradually emerged as the answer to the dilemmas of both freedman and planter. In this system, freedmen and poor whites who were unable to afford land of their own contracted with landowners to work a particular piece of land in exchange for a share of the crops or revenue they produced in a given season. Typically, a small group of laborers—often a family but sometimes simply a group of workers who got along well together—would agree to cultivate a certain parcel of land in exchange for one-quarter to one-half the crop as wages, to be paid at the end of the season. The landowner would also generally provide the tenants with a small cabin to live in and food to eat.

Sharecropping initially appealed to freedmen because it promised benefits they had previously been denied, such as the right to work in families or groups of their choice, the freedom to work under their own supervision in their daily activities, and the potential that extra effort might eventually earn them enough profit that they could buy a small piece of land for themselves. However, the vast majority of sharecroppers ended up working in conditions that weren't much better than slavery. Landowners generally retained the right to dictate what their tenants planted and how they worked the land; some even kept their tenants under near-constant supervision. What's more, sharecropping rarely produced a profit for the tenants. In a good year, sharecroppers could earn enough to save a few dollars, but it was generally more likely that they would end up in debt at the end of the season. If a group of sharecroppers encountered a series of bad years—

due to poor weather, for example, or infestations of crop-destroying insects—they could quickly find themselves buried in more debt than they could ever hope to repay.

Despite its exploitative nature (and in part because of it), by the early 1900s sharecropping had become the norm throughout the South, allowing white landowners to continue to prosper while ensuring that those who could not afford land—both black and white—remained poor. During the Great Depression, government programs designed to aid southern agriculture only deepened the racial and class divides upon which sharecropping flourished. This was particularly true of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, which paid landowners to reduce their output and adopt production quotas in order to raise the profit they could make on what they did produce. When landowners agreed to take some of their acreage out of production, the tenants who had been working those acres found themselves homeless and jobless. Furthermore, government payments to landowners gave them the capital they needed to buy tractors and other farm equipment that further reduced their need for tenant labor. In 1934, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) emerged to unite sharecroppers against these inhumane conditions, and for the next few years it made considerable gains. However, neither government aid nor the STFU could reverse falling cotton prices or the fact that mechanized farming methods were increasingly making sharecroppers obsolete. By the end of World War II, sharecropping had largely faded into history as farming became increasingly mechanized and former tenants were forced to migrate to cities, where industrial work was more plentiful.

[4833] Marion Post Walcott, *Tenant Family on Their Porch, Marcella Plantation, Mileston, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-030534-M2].

[4806] Arthur Rothstein, *Evicted sharecroppers along Highway 60, New Madrid County, Missouri* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-002968-M1].

QUESTIONS

Comprehension: If sharecroppers were unable to make a satisfactory living by sharecropping, why did they continue doing it?

Context: As Abner Snopes looks upon his white landlord's plantation house in Faulkner's "Barn Burning," he tells his son, Sartie: "That's sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain't white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it." How does this illustrate the difference Snopes sees between himself and his fellow sharecroppers who are African American? How did white supremacy in the South draw on an argument of **paternalism** to maintain sharecropping as an exploitative system of agricultural production?

Exploration: The agrarian life associated with farming has always been an important but contested ideal in American life. Thomas Jefferson, for example, famously supported the ideal of the "gen-

"PROMISES UNFULFILLED" WEB ARCHIVE

[1452] Anonymous, *The Whole Black Family at the Hermitage, Savannah, GA* (1907), courtesy of the Detroit Publishing Company. In the 1850s, the Hermitage was home to over two hundred slaves. There was a brick factory on the plantation, and the slaves made both the bricks and their homes. These structures still stand today, while other slave cottages made of wood have deteriorated. Sharecropping perpetuated the economic disenfranchisement of African Americans well into the twentieth century.

[2929] Anonymous, *Adults Seated, Facing Camera, Child Playing in Barrel in Foreground, Plantation Setting* (1880), courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. While many former slaves left the plantation after emancipation, an even larger number stayed in the area and rented farms for either cash or, more commonly, a share of their harvest. The latter system, called sharecropping, was practiced by both blacks and poor whites throughout the South.

[4099] Anonymous, *Tenants* (c. 1880–1900), courtesy of Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library. Photograph of African American tenant farmers working in a cotton field. After the Civil War, "cotton remained king" and was a main staple of the southern economy through the first quarter of the twentieth century. Southern life was inextricably tied to the crop; political scientists and economists have even shown a strong link between the price of cotton and the number of lynchings in the South during the Jim Crow era.

[4806] Arthur Rothstein, *Evicted Sharecroppers along Highway 60, New Madrid County, Missouri* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-002968-M1]. After the Civil War, sharecropping and tenant farming replaced slave labor on many plantations throughout the South. Conditions were arguably little better than slavery for many African Americans, who were given freedom but rented the land and

tleman farmer" (see Unit 4). Compare Jefferson's ideas about the agrarian life with the system of sharecropping as it developed in the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Why do you think Jefferson's ideal was never realized?

ASSIGNMENTS

Personal and Creative Responses

1. *Journal:* "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" by Richard Wright depicts the life of poor black southerners very differently from the way that life is depicted by Zora Neale Hurston in "The Gilded Six-Bits." Wright was, in fact, very critical of the way Hurston portrayed southern blacks; for him, Hurston's characters were too happy and lived too much in the moment with no thought for what might happen the next day. Wright worried that Hurston's white readers might get the idea that all African Americans in the South were as carefree and happy as those in Hurston's stories. Pretend you are Hurston and you have just heard Wright's critique of your work. Write a letter to Wright in which you explain and defend your creation of characters like Missie May and Joe.
2. *Doing History:* Study the images of sharecropping families in the archive and read accounts of what life was like for them. Choose one image and write an account of what a typical day might have been like for the family shown in that image. How early does their day begin? What kinds of things does each person have to do to keep the family going? What are the main concerns of the family members? What are their hopes for the future?
3. *Multimedia:* Study the images of southern life contained in the archive and create a short slide-show depicting the various facets of early-twentieth-century southern life. Write short captions for each image to help your audience understand the composition of southern communities in this period. What was the role of religion? Who had automobiles? What other forms of transportation did people use? How did men and women typically pass their time?

Problem-Based Learning Projects

1. Imagine you have been asked to help create a museum exhibit comparing the Old South to the New South. Working with one other student, search the archive and read the literature in this unit for images and descriptions of the various ideas of the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Choose ten to twelve items (images as well as short selections from written works) that depict the Old South and ten to twelve items that depict the New South; then write a "guide" to your collection that explains the role of each item in this exhibit.

2. The year is 1932. Imagine that you and several of your classmates live in Springcreek, a small southern town where the economy has been ravaged by the Great Depression and several years of poor cotton crops. You recently heard about a man who wants to build a rubber factory somewhere in your area. The factory will employ a hundred workers and attract many other businesses to the community in which it is built (including a movie theater and a department store). Some people in your town would love to have the factory in Springcreek. But because your town is so isolated, the rubber factory owner won't consider locating his business there unless he can be assured that the roads between Springcreek and the nearest city are good enough to ensure he'll be able to get needed supplies and ship his rubber goods to his customers. Lucky for you, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) has just offered to help build a highway between Springcreek and the city. There's just one problem: many Springcreek residents are opposed to the idea because they fear a highway, a factory, a movie theater, a department store, and other new businesses will threaten their traditional way of life. Working in a group, stage the town council meeting at which the residents of Springcreek debate the merits of allowing the rubber factory to be built in their town. Your meeting should include people who support the plan as well as people who oppose it, and both sides should have well-reasoned arguments to support their position. Appoint one person as mayor to listen to the debate and make a final decision on the matter.
3. One of the fundamental events that helped shape the Southern Renaissance was the Scopes "Monkey" trial, officially known as *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*. The trial pitted Scopes, a substitute science teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, against the Butler Act, Tennessee's statute that made it illegal to teach evolution in the state's public schools. Working with a group of your peers, research the background leading up to the trial, as well as the trial itself. Once you're familiar with the trial, work together to script a short, one-act play dramatizing the events of the trial, making sure there are enough roles for each of you so that you'll be able to "stage" a short re-enactment of the trial for your class. After your performance, invite your classmates to discuss how and why this trial was so important to the development of southern writing in the late 1920s and 1930s.

often owed more than they made. During the Great Depression, white and black sharecroppers and farmers, like this family, were displaced from their land and homes.
[4833] Marion Post Walcott, *Tenant Family on Their Porch, Marcella Plantation, Mileston, Mississippi Delta* (1939), courtesy of the Library of Congress [LC-USF33-030534-M2]. African American sharecropping family seated on their porch. Plantation owners were generally also the owners of sharecroppers' homes, which resembled, and sometimes were, old slave cabins. The plantation owners also controlled the rent and decided which crops should be planted. As payment, landlords usually received most of the profits.

GLOSSARY

Agrarianism The belief that society and daily life should be structured around the cultivation of the soil. According to literary critic and historian M. Thomas Inge, Agrarians believe that the direct contact with nature that comes from farming will bring humans closer to God and encourage the values of "honor, manliness, self-reliance, courage, moral integrity, and hospitality." Furthermore, Agrarians

believe that urban life, capitalism, and technology destroy human dignity and independence while also encouraging vice and moral weakness. In the 1920s and 1930s a prominent group of southern writers—including John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren—loosely subscribed to the basic tenets of Agrarianism and therefore became known as the Southern Agrarians.

Fugitive Poets Group of poets and critics centered at Vanderbilt University in the early 1920s. The group included John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren and first gained a degree of prominence for *The Fugitive*, the magazine they published from 1922 to 1925 as an outlet for their writing. According to critic J. A. Bryant, the group's goal was simply to "demonstrate that a group of southerners could produce important work in the medium, devoid of sentimentality and carefully crafted, with special attention to the logical coherence of substance and trope."

New Criticism School of criticism which emerged primarily in the South and which argued that critics had for too long paid too much attention to the biographical and historical contexts of a work of literature. New Critics advocated a focus on "the thing itself"—the language and the structural and formal qualities of the poem, novel, play, or story with which the critic was concerned. The foundation of New Criticism was, and remains, the exercise of "close reading," which for poetry often means a word-by-word or line-by-line analysis of the poem, the goal of which is to discern the most coherent meaning within its language and form. Although the New Criticism had become the dominant critical practice by the mid-twentieth century, most contemporary critics merely use it as a starting point for various other critical approaches. Many southern writers are closely associated with New Criticism, including John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, and Cleanth Brooks.

Old South Refers to the romantic and sentimental myth of what the South once was. The myth of the Old South generally referred to the "plantation legend" of antebellum (and much postbellum) popular fiction which portrayed white southerners as genteel aristocrats and slavery as a benevolent, paternal institution from which blacks and whites benefited equally. The first few chapters of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* capture the myth of the Old South. Opposed to the myth of the Old South were ideas of the New South, including the view that southerners should try to "modernize" and reshape their region on the industrial model of the North.

paternalism From the Latin *pater*, meaning to act like a father. In the context of the American South, paternalism generally refers to the attitude of many white southerners toward African Americans in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth. According to the paternalist defense of slavery, African Americans were childlike and unable to take proper care of themselves; therefore, they needed white "masters" to take care of them and guide them through life. After the Civil War, the paternalist argument continued to be used as a pretext for the exploitative working conditions of sharecropping, as well as for the strict code of laws and etiquette known as Jim Crow.

Reconstruction Period immediately following the Civil War during which the federal government attempted to force the former Confederate states to govern themselves according to the laws and customs of the rest of the United States. During this time (also known as the period of "Radical Reconstruction"), federal troops helped enforce universal male suffrage, and former leaders of the Confederate Army were barred from serving in public office. For the first time, African Americans were elected to serve as legislators and governors in southern states. Despite the fact that no state was ever controlled by a majority of African Americans, white southerners bitterly resented being forced to treat African Americans as equals, and by 1876 the period of Radical Reconstruction had effectively ended.

regionalism Writing that emphasizes the importance of a regional setting and tradition to individuals' lives. While regional writing tends to focus on issues or experiences that are native to the place with which it is concerned, the best examples of regionalism have universal appeal as well.

revolt against the village Theme in American literature in the 1920s and 1930s through which many writers (notably the members of the "Lost Generation"—see Unit 11) criticized their own society for its crudeness, materialism, and repression. Also refers more generally to early-twentieth-century changes in society—such as the rise of mass media and an increasingly mobile population—which appeared to threaten the cohesiveness and autonomy of the traditional community.

southern gothic Style of writing marked by southern settings and characters which are somehow dark, mysterious, or grotesque, or which otherwise disturb or question the "normal" expectations of their readers. Writers associated with the southern gothic include William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Tennessee Williams, and Carson McCullers. See also Unit 6.

stream of consciousness Style of writing used by many modernists that attempts to portray the inner workings of a character's mind by cataloging or describing the character's thoughts and ideas in rapid succession and without any interpretation or explanation by an outside narrator. So-named by William James, who described human consciousness as a continuous stream of thoughts, impressions, emotions, and ideas. William Faulkner used this style in *As I Lay Dying*, which forces readers to assemble an overall narrative from the various thoughts, feelings, and observations of fifteen different characters. The stream-of-consciousness style challenged traditional narrative by abandoning the linear form in favor of the more confused and sometimes random jumps of the human mind.

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