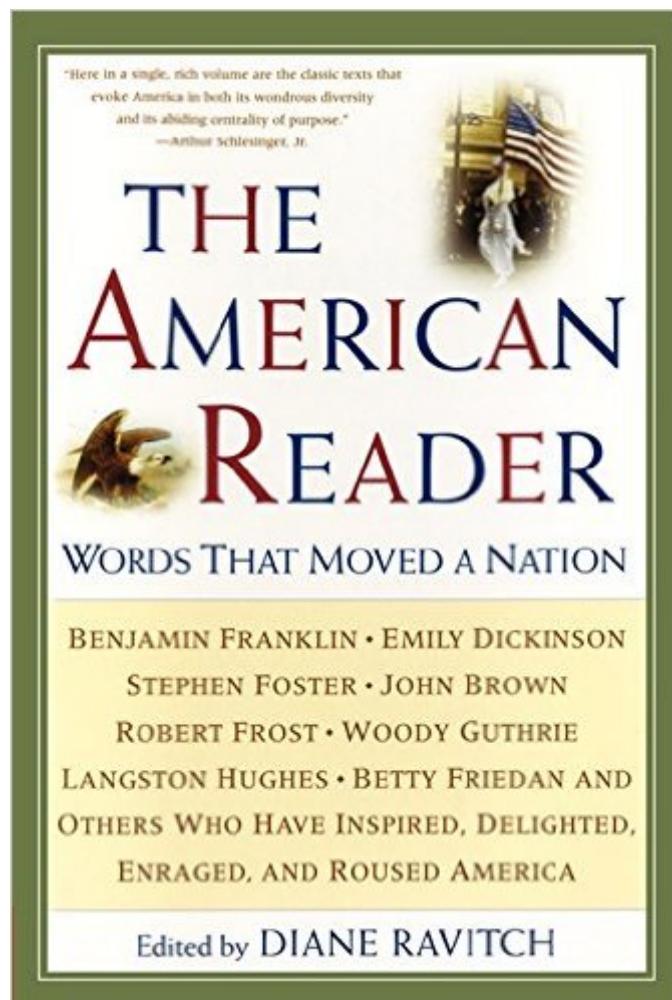


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The American Reader: Words That Moved A Nation



Synopsis

The American Reader is a stirring and memorable anthology that captures the many facets of American culture and history in prose and verse. The 200 poems, speeches, songs, essays, letters, and documents were chosen both for their readability and for their significance. These are the words that have inspired, enraged, delighted, chastened, and comforted Americans in days gone by. Gathered here are the writings that illuminate "with wit, eloquence, and sometimes sharp words" significant aspects of national consciousness. They reflect the part that all Americans "black and white, native born and immigrant, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American, poor and wealthy" have played in creating the nation's character.

Book Information

Paperback: 656 pages

Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks; 2nd Rev ed. edition (September 5, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0062737333

ISBN-13: 978-0062737335

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1.5 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (21 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

The American Reader is an anthology of wonderful poems and speeches from critical figures in American history. It is not only perfect for the classroom, but a great bedside companion. I like to read a different selection every night. It is a good tool for self-education, for those of us who had too much "social studies" and not enough real history. And it is fun to read. I love it.

With the politicization of the schools and the increasing emphasis on race, gender and ethnicity as guides to the "multicultural" curriculum, we have lost the emphasis on our common heritage that should bind us together as a nation and a society. The sad proof of this is how little American kids know about the past that is their cultural patrimony. National Assessment of Educational Progress

tests have revealed that three quarters of high school juniors tested did not know when Abraham Lincoln was president; one third did not know what the Brown Decision was about, and 70% could not identify the Magna Carta. One third did not know that the phrase "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" is from the Declaration of Independence; many were unfamiliar with the Gettysburg Address. The American Reader is the best corrective to this situation that there is. Between its covers it presents those words that define our country's past and have expressed its goals and its dreams, its efforts and its achievements. This is what American children should be reading in school. Since many of them are not doing so, this book should be in every home, ready at hand to every parent and teacher.

This book is fun to read and an excellent source of classic Americana. Ravitch's selections reflect the pulse of the nation. It contains a rich selection of poetry, essays, speeches, folk songs that map the American experience. It offers insight into who we are as Americans and how we got there.

I love this book. I enjoy reading the poems and speeches that represent our American heritage. I have shared it with my children and like to read them some of my own favorites. I warmly recommend it to parents and teachers!!

I loved reading this book. Most of the 18th century and early 19th century stuff I had read before. But still it's great to have important documents in one place. I particularly enjoyed the juxtaposition of politics with poetry. I must take issue with a reviewer who disliked this book and wrote, "This book should really be titled The Anti-American Reader. The book is dominated by lame poetry about and by Blacks and Women ..." Emily Dickinson and Langston Hughes are among the greatest writers America has ever produced. If anyone thinks that Dickinson's "Success is counted Sweetest" is a "lame" poem then they should have stayed awake during high school English class. I do have one suggestion for the next edition of this book: Instead of Whitman's "O Captain, My Captain," and "I Hear America Singing"--two rather overrated works--Ravitch should include Whitman's masterful elegy to Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed." Finally to the reviewer who wrote "I will burn this book," I have a better idea: Donate this wonderful book to the high school nearest you so that the students there can read this book and get a better education than you received.

This is a new edition of essays compiled by Diane Ravitch, which I bought because someone "borrowed" my old copy and never brought it back. In the preface, she writes that she removed

pieces written after 1970 from this edition, because "1) she hasn't found poems, essays, speeches written in the past 30 years that match the literary quality of the earlier selections and resonate in the national consciousness 2) cultural authenticity is harder to find than in the past and 3) we tend now to turn to social scientists rather than poets and songwriters to express and understand our concerns, and they tend not to write in literary style." These are strong opinions, which I appreciate in a writer, although I partially disagree. Maybe she's right about the genres in this book, but contemporary fiction is arguably better. The second point needs clarification, and some social scientists are also "literary." But Ravitch has chosen wonderful pieces! As I was re-reading the first selections - William Bradford on the landing at Plymouth, James Otis, John Adams, Patrick Henry, and Alexander Hamilton on freedom and liberty, a group of unnamed Massachusetts slaves petitioning the governor, and Chief Logan's heartbreakingly moving lament, I could not help but compare the eloquence, intelligence, honor and fiery patriotism with the rhetoric we have been hearing in the current election cycle, which seems more about the horse race than anything. No matter what your political affiliation is, to read these words and compare them to what most pundits and politicians say today is to read and weep. Maybe I was particularly affected this way because we just had an election. But what is really amazing about these selections is how timely, important, and universal they are. I wish every American would read this book. This book is useful for teachers, writers, or anyone interested in our nation's history.

This title of this book is quite misleading. A better title would have been, "Writings that Promoted the Growth of Statist Ideology in America." There are smattering of poems and songs that all Americans have loved and cherished, pre-civil war entries, but selection of political writings of the post Civil War period are mostly Democrats, and the cultural entries are typically songs and anthems that inspired the New Left in America. Democrats and socialists will love this book because it will inspire and reinforce their world view. Everyone else will easily note the literary hole that is left out, the writings that inspired true American exceptionalism.

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