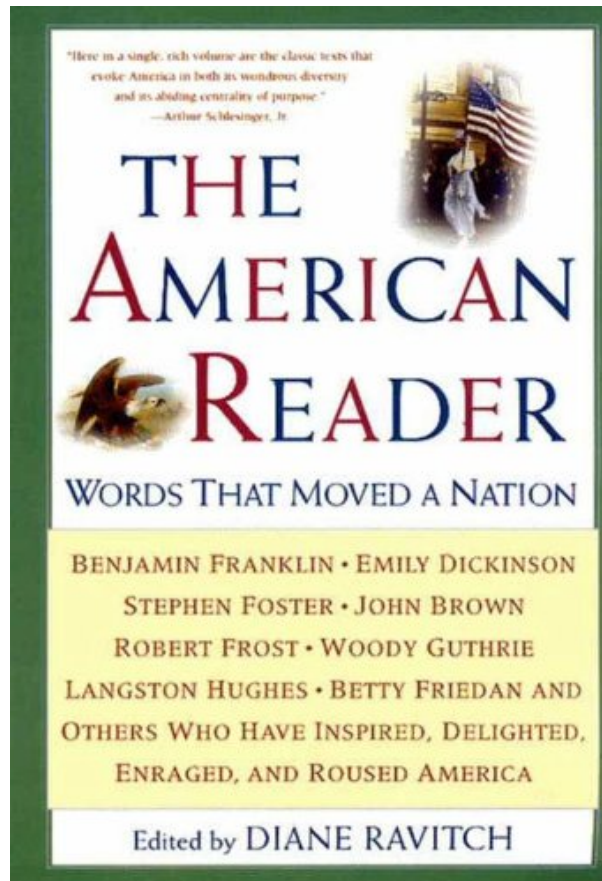


THE AMERICAN READER: WORDS THAT MOVED A NATION BY DIANE RAVITCH



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THE AMERICAN READER

WORDS THAT MOVED A NATION

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN • EMILY DICKINSON
STEPHEN FOSTER • JOHN BROWN
ROBERT FROST • WOODY GUTHRIE
LANGSTON HUGHES • BETTY FRIEDAN AND
OTHERS WHO HAVE INSPIRED, DELIGHTED,
ENRAGED, AND ROUSED AMERICA

Edited by DIANE RAVITCH

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Review

"Patriotic in the best and broadest, nonpartisan, and large-spirited sense."-- Booklist""*The American Reader* is a splendid collection of the words and sentiments that have shaped our nation. It belongs in every American home."-- E. D. Hirsch, author of "Cultural Literacy""This unique multicultural patchwork of political and literary American writings--some famous, some virtually unknown--is a treasure." -- "USA Today""Far more than a marvelous collection of text and images, Ravitch's anthology is also a journey through the American democratic experience. And by showing us the contributions diverse Americans have made to articulating our common democratic ideals and to our efforts to live up to them, Ravitch has provided a sourcebook of unity for our 'teeming Nation of nations.'"-- Albert Shanker, former president, "American Federation of Teachers"

About the Author

Diane Ravitch, a historian of education, is Research Professor at New York University, holds Brown Chair in Education Studies at the Brookings Institution, and is a Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. A former Guggenheim Fellow and recipient of many awards, she is also the author of the recent book *Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reforms*.

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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.

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Most helpful customer reviews

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Great anthology

By Eric B

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.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

The Golden Age never was the present Age (B. Franklin)

By Ann A.

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 heartbreaking 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.

36 of 42 people found the following review helpful.

What We've Lost Is Found Again

By A Customer

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.

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