



THE NORTON  
ANTHOLOGY

1865 TO THE  
PRESENT

SHORTER TENTH EDITION

AMERICAN  
LITERATURE

# THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY AMERICAN LITERATURE

SHORTER TENTH EDITION  
VOLUME 2  
1865 TO THE PRESENT

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The theme of literacy winds its way through many of Jacob Lawrence's paintings, as in this view of a crowded library reading room. Lawrence (1917–2000) undertook serious research before creating a painting or series of paintings, often reading books of history and visiting libraries and museums—in effect, teaching himself the story of Black Americans that at the time was rarely touched on in school.

Quite possibly, this is a view of the 135th Street Library in Harlem, now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Perhaps the figure standing at the front looking at a book of African art represents Lawrence as a young man.



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## WALT WHITMAN

### 1819–1892

alt Whitman revolutionized American poetry. Responding to Emerson's call in "The Poet" (1842) for an American bard who would address all "the facts of the animal economy, sex, nutriment, gestation, birth," he put the living, breathing, sexual body at the center of much of his poetry, challenging conventions of the day. Responding to Emerson's call for a "metre-making argument," he rejected traditions of poetic scansion and elevated diction, improvising the form that has come to be known as free verse, while adopting a wide-ranging vocabulary opening new possibilities for poetic expression. A poet of democracy, Whitman celebrated the mystical, divine potential of the individual; a poet of the urban, he wrote about the sights, sounds, and energy of the modern metropolis. In his 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, he declared that "the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." On the evidence of his enormous influence on later poets—Hart Crane, Langston Hughes, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Cherrie Moraga, Adrienne Rich, and countless others, including Spain's Federico García Lorca and Chile's Pablo Neruda—Whitman not only was affectionately absorbed by his own country but remains a persistent presence in poetry throughout the world.

Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, in West Hills, Long Island (New York), the second of eight surviving children of the Quakers Louisa Van Velsor and Walter Whitman. In 1823, Whitman's father, a farmer turned carpenter, sought to take advantage of a building boom by moving the family to Brooklyn—then a town at the western and most urbanized part of Long Island. Whitman left school when he was eleven, and was soon employed in the printing office of a newspaper; when his family moved east on Long Island in 1833, he remained in Brooklyn on his own. He began contributing pieces to newspapers in his midteens and spent five years teaching at country and small-town schools on Long Island, interrupting his teaching to start a newspaper of his own in 1838 and to work briefly on another Long Island paper. By early 1840 he had started the series "Sun-Down Papers from the Desk of a School-Master" for the Jamaica, New York, *Democrat* and was writing poems and fiction. One of his stories prophetically culminated with the dream of writing "a wonderful and ponderous book."

Just before he turned twenty-one Whitman stopped teaching, moved to Manhattan, began work at the literary weekly *New World*, and soon became editor of a Manhattan daily, the *Aurora*. He also began a political career by speaking at Democratic rallies and writing for the *Democratic Review*, the foremost magazine of the Democratic Party. He exulted in the extremes of the city, where street-gang violence was countered by the lectures of Emerson and where even a young editor could get to know the poet William Cullen Bryant, editor of the *Evening Post*. Fired from the *Aurora*, which publicly charged him with laziness, he wrote a temperance novel, *Franklin Evans*, or the *Inebriate*, for a one-issue extra of the *New World* late in 1842. After three years of various literary and political jobs, he returned to Brooklyn in 1845, becoming a special contributor to the *Long Island Star*, assigned to Manhattan events, included theatrical and musical performances. All through the 1840s he attended operas on his journalist's passes, and he would later say that without the "emotions, raptures, uplifts" of opera he could never have written *Leaves of Grass*. Just before he was twenty-seven he took over the editorship of the *Brooklyn Eagle*,

writing most of the literary reviews, which included books by Carlyle, Emerson, Melville, Fuller, and Goethe, among others. Like most Democrats, he was able to justify the Mexican War (1846–48) by hailing the great American mission of “peopling the New World with a noble race.” Yet at the beginning of 1848 he was fired from the *Eagle* because, like Bryant, he had become a Free-Soiler, opposed to the acquisition of more territory for slavery. Whitman served as a delegate to the Buffalo Free-Soil convention and helped to found the Free-Soil newspaper the *Brooklyn Freeman*. Around this time he began writing poetry in a serious way, experimenting with form and prosody; he published several topical poems in 1850, including “Europe,” which would later appear in *Leaves of Grass*.

Whitman’s notebook fragments suggest that he began to invent the overall shape of his first volume of poetry during 1853–54. On May 15, 1855, he took out a copyright for *Leaves of Grass*, and he spent the spring and early summer seeing his book through the press, probably setting some of the type himself. Published in Brooklyn, New York, during the first week of July, the volume, bound in dark green cloth with a sprig of grass in gilt on the cover, contained twelve untitled poems (including the initial version of “Song of Myself”), along with an exuberant preface declaring his ambition to be the American bard. In the image of Whitman on the book’s frontispiece, which was based on an 1854 daguerreotype, the bearded Whitman—rejecting the conventional suit jacket, buttoned-up shirt, and high collar of the formal studio portrait—stands with one arm akimbo, one hand in a pocket, workingman’s hat on slightly cocked head, shirt unbuttoned at the collar, looking directly at the reader. (See the image on the following page for a reproduction of the frontispiece.) The image, like the poetry itself, defied convention by aligning the poet with working people. The poems, with their absence of standard verse and stanza patterns (although strongly rhythmic and controlled by numerous poetic devices of repetition and variation), also introduced his use of “catalogs”—journalistic and encyclopedic listings—that were to become a hallmark of his style. Whitman sent out numerous presentation and review copies of his book, receiving an immediate response from Emerson, who greeted him “at the beginning of a great career.” As weeks passed, Whitman chose to publish a few anonymous reviews himself, praising *Leaves of Grass* in the *American Phrenological Journal*, for instance, as one of “the most glorious triumphs, in the known history of literature.” In October he let Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* print Emerson’s private letter of praise, and he put clippings of the letter in presentation copies to Longfellow, among others. Emerson termed Whitman’s appropriation of the letter “a strange, rude thing,” but he remained interested in meeting the poet. While Whitman was angling for reviews in England and working on expanding his book, Emerson visited him in December of 1855. Thoreau, who admired *Leaves of Grass* but found several of its poems “simply sensual,” visited him in 1856. That year also saw the appearance of the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, now with thirty-three poems, including “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” under its initial title, “Sundown Poem.”

Returning to miscellaneous journalism, Whitman edited the *Brooklyn Times* from 1857 to 1859 and published several pieces in the *Times* affirming his Free-Soiler hopes for a continued national expansion into the western territories that would not entail the expansion of slavery. In the third (1860) edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman began to group his poems thematically. For a section called “Enfants d’Adam,” later retitled “Children of Adam,” he wrote fifteen poems focused on what he termed the “amative” love of man for woman, in contrast to the “adhesive” love of man for man. Adhesive love figured in forty-five poems in a section titled “Calamus.” These two sections in the 1860 edition differ from the sections in the final 1891–92 edition, for in the intervening editions (1867, 1871, 1881) Whitman revised and regrouped some of the poems, as he would with numerous other poems in the expanded editions he would go on to publish.

# Leaves of Grass.

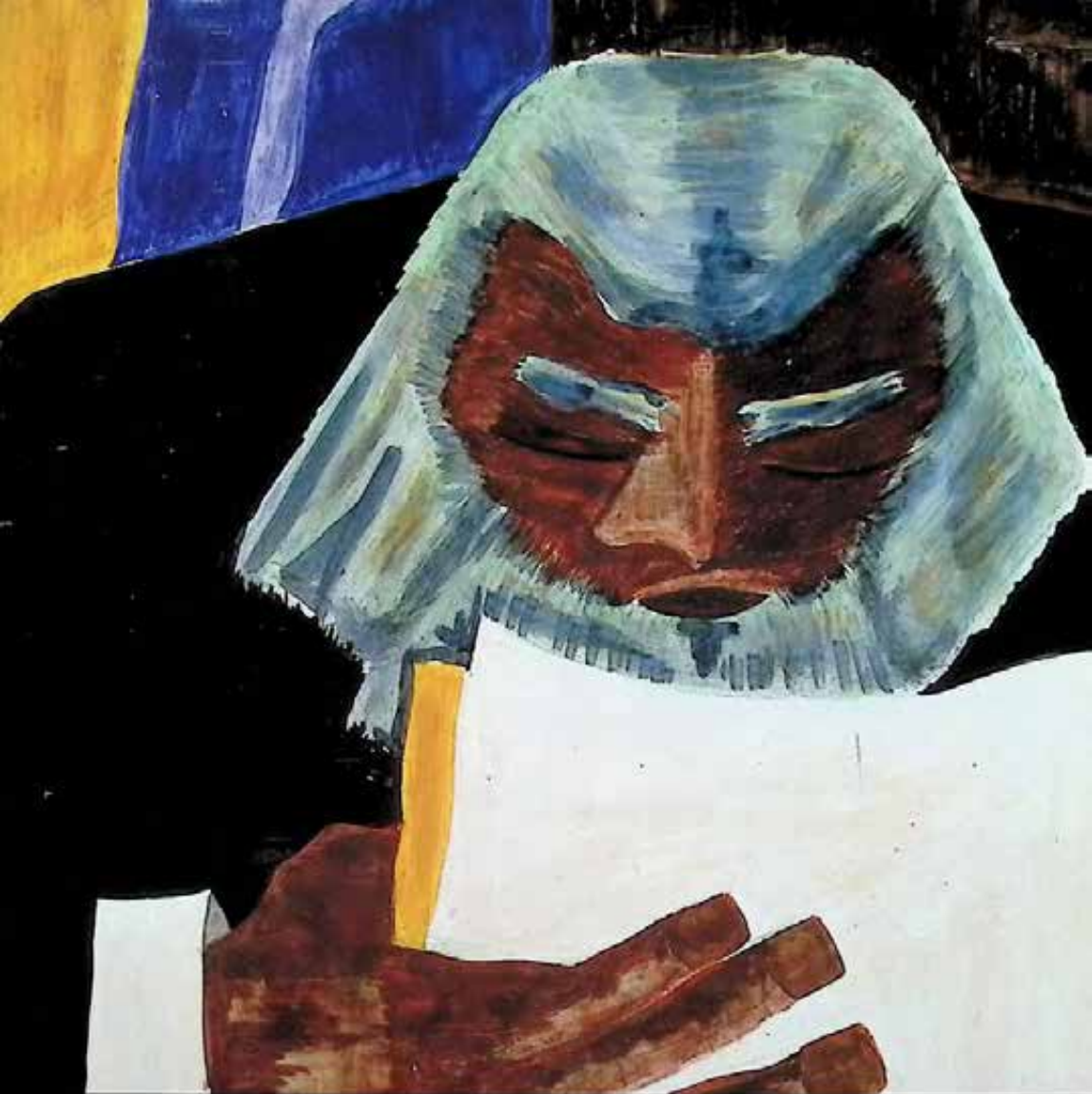


Brooklyn, New York:  
1855.

*Leaves of Grass*. Frontispiece and title page of the first edition.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Whitman began to visit the wounded and eventually offered his services as a nurse. He started at New-York Hospital; but in early 1863, after visiting with his wounded brother George in an army camp in Virginia, he moved to Washington, D.C., and began to work at the huge open-air military hospitals there. Nursing gave Whitman a profound sense of vocation. As he wrote a friend in 1863: "I am very happy . . . I was never so beloved. I am running over with health, fat, red & sunburnt in face. I tell thee I am just the one to go to our sick boys." But ministering to tens of thousands of maimed and dying young men took its toll. He succinctly voiced his anguish in a notebook entry of 1864: "the dead, the dead, the dead, our dead." During this time he worked on a series of poems that conveyed his evolving view of the war from heroic celebration to despair at the horrifying carnage. He later wrote a chapter in his prose work *Specimen Days* (1882) titled "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books"; but incorporating the "real war" into a book of poetry became one of the dominant impulses of the *Drum-Taps* collection, which he published in 1865. After Lincoln's assassination, Whitman reissued the volume with a sequel including "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," his famous elegy for the murdered president.

As he prepared *Drum-Taps and Sequel* for publication in late 1865, Whitman was also revising *Leaves of Grass* at his desk in the Department of the Interior, where he had obtained a position as clerk. The new secretary of the interior, James Harlan, read the annotated copy and fired Whitman for writing an obscene book, objecting to Whitman's frankness about bodily functions and heterosexual love. Whitman's friend, the poet William O'Connor, found him another clerical position in the attorney general's office; and in his rage at the firing O'Connor wrote *The Good Gray Poet* (1866), identifying Whitman with Jesus and Harlan with the forces of evil. Whitman continued to rework *Leaves of Grass*, incorporating *Drum-Taps* into it in



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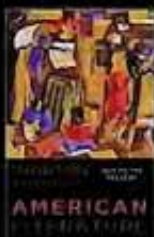
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Cover art: Jacob Lawrence, *The Life of Frederick Douglass*. 1939. Panel 30. Casein tempera on hardboard, 12 x 17 7/8". Hampton University Museum, Hampton, VA.  
Photo: The Jacob and Gwendolyn Lawrence Foundation / Art Resource NY.

In 1938 Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) began research for a series of paintings about Frederick Douglass. The series, completed in 1939, is divided into three phases: Douglass as an enslaved person, as a fugitive, and as a free person. One of Douglass's many accomplishments was the 1847 founding of a Black newspaper, which covered topics of great consequence for the African American community, such as the Fugitive Slave Law and the Dred Scott Decision. Here, in this bold, almost intimidating painting, Lawrence presents Douglass as looking down and reading with impressive absorption, perhaps seeking to remind us of the importance of Douglass's acquisition of literacy, as depicted in his 1845 *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave*.



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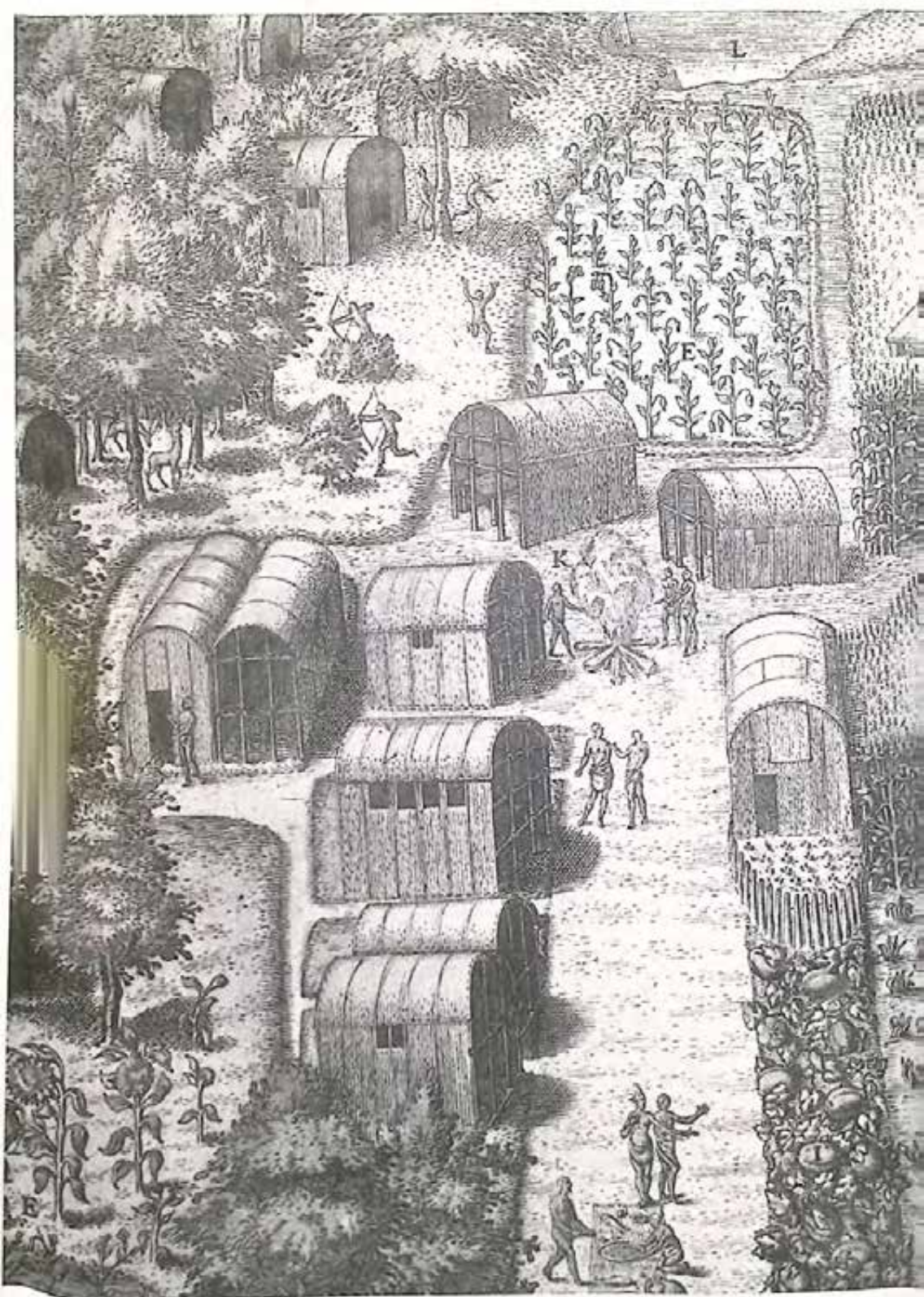
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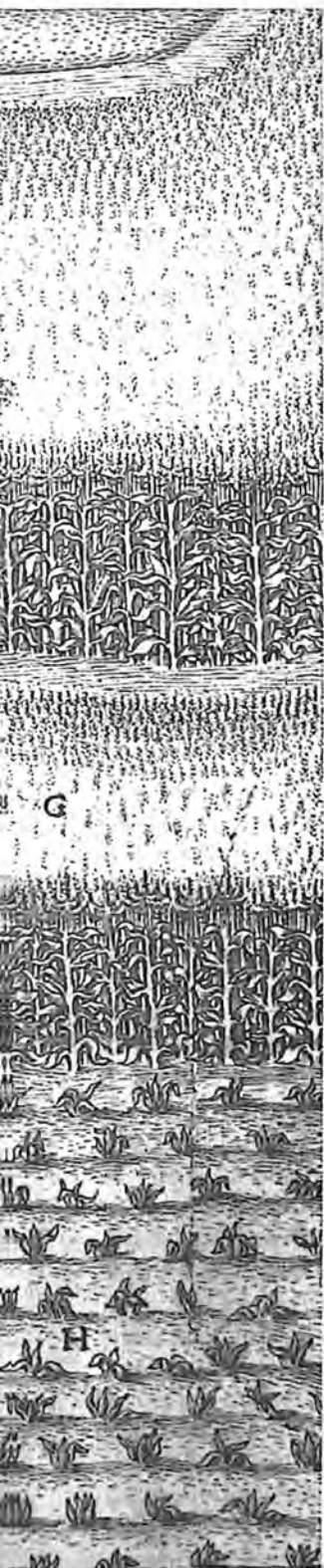
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 112 [Success is counted sweetest] 1224  
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 202 ["Faith" is a fine invention] 1226  
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# Beginnings to 1820

## QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY

In 1631, the English captain John Smith published *Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters of New England*, the last and most polished of his works. Smith had been instrumental in the 1607 founding of Jamestown in Virginia, England's first long-lived American settlement, and he later provided guidance for both the Pilgrims who established Plymouth in 1620 and the Puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony 10 years later. Reading *Advertisements for the Unexperienced Planters* now, when anticolonial and independence movements have made colonization justly suspect, Smith's endorsement of English plantations in North America strikes a discordant note. Smith anticipated such objections, for he heard them from his contemporaries. "Many good religious devout men have made it a great question, as a matter in conscience, by what warrant they might goe to possesse those Countries, which are none of theirs, but the poore Salvages [i.e., savages]," he wrote. He considered the answer to this objection self-evident: "for God did make the world to be inhabited with mankind, and to have his name knowne to all Nations, and from generation to generation." Although hardly a pious man, Smith saw God's hand at work in England's seizing of the Americas.

On a more mundane level, the dense population and soil depletion in England seemed to Smith sufficient reason to take advantage of the fact that "here in Florida, Virginia, New-England, and Cannada, is more land than all the people in Christendome can manure [that is, cultivate], and yet more to spare than

John White, *Indian Village of Secoton* (detail), 1585. For more information about this image, see the color insert in this volume.

all the natives of those Countries can use and culturated." The continent's native inhabitants, he enthused, would "sell you a whole Countrey" in exchange "for a copper kettle and a few toys, as beads and hatchets." In his text, Smith did not consider that these "sales" might have been based on different concepts of property, nor did he dwell on the deadly epidemics that decimated Native societies following the arrival of Europeans. He based his arguments for colonization on the precedents available in sacred and secular history. Adam and Eve established a plantation, Smith argued, as did Noah and his family after the flood, and so on through "the Hebrewes, Lacedemonians, the Goths, Grecians, Romans, and the rest." Moreover Portugal and Spain had a one-hundred-and-forty-year lead on England in terms of colony formation, and they were wresting great wealth from the people of the Americas, who once had possessed the natural resources. It would be "neglect of our duty and religion" as well as "want of charity to those poore Salvages" to fail to challenge these Roman Catholic countries for control of the hemisphere, Smith concluded. The difficulty today of seeing European settlement as an expression of "charity" to the "Salvages" means that the "great question" raised by the "good religious devout men" opposed to colonization remains fresh and vital.

In 1805, the Seneca orator Sagoyewatha, or Red Jacket, offered a Native perspective on colonization in an address to the missionary Jacob Cram that can serve as a rebuttal of Smith. "There was a time when our forefathers owned this great island," Sagoyewatha told Cram. "Their seats extended from the rising to the setting sun. The Great Spirit had made it for the use of Indians." When "your forefathers" arrived, he continued, "they found friends and not enemies. They told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men, and had come here to enjoy their religion. They asked us for a small seat. We took pity on them, granted their request; and they sat down amongst us." Sagoyewatha went on to describe the devastating impact on Native Americans of the strong alcohol introduced by Europeans and to relate how the once small colonial populations had grown and spilled over onto lands that the Natives had not meant to relinquish. He also challenged Cram on the relevance of Christianity to Native communities, which, he stressed, had their own religious traditions. In addition, Christianity hardly seemed a unifying force for good. "If there is but one religion," Sagoyewatha asked, "why do you white people differ so much about it? Why [are you] not all agreed, as you can all read the book [that is, the Bible]?"

In his 1782 book *Letters from an American Farmer*, the French-born writer J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur posed another resonant question of identity: "What is an American?" Crèvecoeur offered his most explicit answer to this question in Letter III, where he described "the American" as a "new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions." The American people were "a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans and Swedes," he wrote, emphasizing that they farmed their own land and peacefully practiced various faiths, including Roman Catholicism, Quakerism, and several forms of Protestantism. Crèvecoeur's description captured important aspects of late colonial society. In its early years, the American colonies were shaped by competing empires: the large ones—New Spain, New France, and the English colonies, including Virginia and New England—and more modest efforts, such as New Netherland and New Sweden. In the eighteenth century, even as Britain

consolidated its empire in North America, an influx of immigrants from Northern Europe produced in the mid-Atlantic colonies the particular mixture that Crèvecoeur described. He contrasted this American "melting" of peoples with life in Europe, where national and religious divisions fueled chronic wars while lingering feudal systems and powerful states oppressed the common people.

Elsewhere in *Letters*, Crèvecoeur complicated his idealized vision of America as a place where Europeans could liberate themselves from the constraints of the Old World. He noted the attractions of the frontier, a borderland where hunting surpassed agriculture as the dominant mode of life. In that contact zone, European Americans adopted the customs and habits of Native Americans even as they sought to supplant them. He also reported on the hierarchical plantation-based societies of the southern colonies, and the horrors inflicted there on enslaved African Americans. His description of a caged slave is one of the most unforgettable passages in the book. In these selections, the liberating potential of the New World is shown to have sharp limits, and the process of nation-formation to have negative ramifications as well as positive consequences.

*Letters from an American Farmer* proved an immediate sensation, for it offered insights into what the emerging nation might become, and how the result might affect Europe. Though Crèvecoeur was probably a Loyalist supporter of British rule, his work was greeted enthusiastically by political radicals in England and Enlightenment philosophes in France, as well as by the American statesman Thomas Jefferson, who echoed Crèvecoeur's enthusiasm for the yeoman farmer in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787). After a period of relative neglect in the nineteenth century, Crèvecoeur's vision of America was revived in 1908, when Israel Zangwill's "The Melting Pot," a play focused on recent waves of European immigration, became a smash hit. Readers embraced *Letters* as a classic of American literature presenting an archetype of American identity. Unfortunately, the resulting view of *Letters* highlighted the formation of European American identity while marginalizing non-European Americans. In recent years, a more comprehensive approach to Crèvecoeur's work has emphasized the sections on slavery and White/Native interactions on the frontier. *Letters from an American Farmer* offers today's readers vivid accounts of assumptions and contradictions that helped shape the early United States and its literature.

Nearly four decades after *Letters from an American Farmer* became one of the literary hits of the age of revolution, Washington Irving cast a backward look at this founding era in his tale "Rip Van Winkle." Irving was born in 1783, the year that the Treaty of Paris brought a formal close to the Revolutionary War, and he was named for the Virginia planter and slave owner who led the Continental Army to victory and later became the first president of the United States. Irving was one of the earliest American-born authors to win international literary celebrity, which he achieved as an expatriate writer living in England. The work that first made him famous was *The Sketch Book* (1819–20), a volume of stories and essays that includes his best-known tales, "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow." While these stories take place in the Catskill region of New York and there are two essays on Native American life and history, the bulk of the volume concerns English customs. This fact suggests the limits to revolutionary