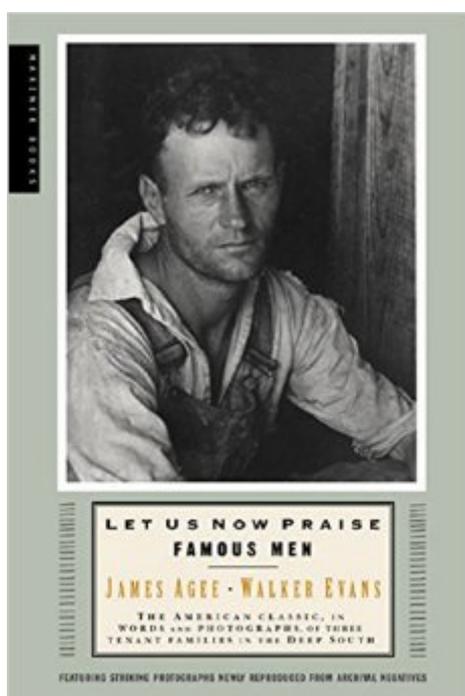


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# Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: The American Classic, In Words And Photographs, Of Three Tenant Families In The Deep South



## Synopsis

A landmark work of American photojournalism â œrenowned for its fusion of social conscience and artistic radicalityâ • (New York Times)â In the summer of 1936, James Agee and Walker Evans set out on assignment for Fortune magazine to explore the daily lives of sharecroppers in the South. Their journey would prove an extraordinary collaboration and a watershed literary event when, in 1941, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was first published to enormous critical acclaim. This unsparing record of place, of the people who shaped the land and the rhythm of their lives, is intensely moving and unrelentingly honest, and todayâ ”recognized by the New York Public Library as one of the most influential books of the twentieth centuryâ ”it stands as a poetic tract of its time. With an elegant new design as well as a sixty-four-page photographic prologue featuring archival reproductions of Evans’s classic images, this historic edition offers readers a window into a remarkable slice of American history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Many people argue about Agee’s complex text. The entire body of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is written in a kind of highly emotional euphoria in which Agee combines his own thoughts and perceptions with exhaustive description of the world around him. His intense feeling causes the writing to be, by conventional grammatical standards, virtually unreadable. Once the reader gets past his chapter-long sentences and widely varying themes, however, the book emerges as one of the greatest written accomplishments of the 20th century. While the nominal subject of the documentary is an in-depth exploration of three tenant farming families during the Great

Depression, the real project (and Agee himself admits this in his remarkably confessional prose) is the documentation of his own experience living with those farmers for several weeks--sleeping in their vermin-infested beds, eating their home-cooked food, and interacting with them on a human level. In addition, Agee self-consciously writes the text and explores the act of writing, both during his stay with the farmers and several years later, when he completed the vast majority of the book. The final product is a patchwork book pieced together from Biblical prayer, Evans's photographs, Agee's flawless descriptions (which, in several cases, may be more accurate than Evans's probably manipulated prints) and meditations on writing, poverty, art, and day-to-day human experience. Two things make this work remarkable: Agee's honesty (he never claims to be objective or non-judgemental) and his innate talent for description. I approached this book with an open mind, and found it to be one of the most thoughtful and rewarding works I have ever read.

This book is an amazing work of art. At times it's baffling, and at times almost impertinent--like when the author decides to describe every object in an entire home, and yet in all these things and in all the conflicting emotions it evokes, it creates a mood and a feeling and a setting that will seep into your skin and fog your brain for months. The writing is beautiful, the story it tells--of poor, sharecropping, depression-era families--is heartbreaking, and the experience of reading about it all is like a baptism by fire. This book just might re-wire your brain. I think this is a much better read than Agee's "A Death in the Family," and that one won the Pulitzer Prize. Read this, for sure. I read it on a bus trip across Guatemala, and the way Agee's descriptions of the old southern poverty fit the poor little towns full of Guatemalan coffee pickers was uncanny. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, and let us start with James Agee. UPDATE: It's years later, and this book has never stopped haunting me. I think of it almost daily. If I were to review it today, I would definitely give it Five Stars.

In one of the most edifying ways, James Agee illustrates the life of the Southern tenant sharecropper in the Great Depression. Agee's writings coupled with the eloquent photography of one notable Walker Evans, distinguishes the book in a elite category unparalleled by few if any whatsoever. The circumstances the sharecropper endured during the Depression not only working the land but also at home with family was rigorous and was additionally exposed very thoroughly in Agee's writings. The book is a must read for anyone interested in the History of the Great Depression era/New Dealism. One other book of notable mention for those interested is Larry Nelson's- KING COTTON'S ADVOCATE.

James Agee's book on the sharecroppers of the American south during the great depression is a book not to be taken lightly. I read this book for a college english class and I can honestly say that most people in the course including myself are confused by Agee's intent and purpose. Agee's highly lyrical and philosophical tone allows a deep analysis into the question of human existence in the depression south. Yet, the very scope and difficulty of his subject is expressed in his confused, perhaps confusing writing. There are lonely moments of insight stacked alongside pages of seemingly irrelevant and baseless speculation. I say seemingly because each time I re-read the passage I find that Agee's words have quite a bit more meaning than I had originally found. This book is not a novel, not journalism but a puzzle which Agee could not piece together. Only with time and care can the reader hope to understand the frustratingly complex yet real message of Agee's work.

Yes, their assignment was to document depression era sharecroppers, but that's not why you should read it. You should read it because James Agee, uniquely in my experience, gets drunk on American language the same way the Delphic sibyl got drunk on methane and babbled worship worthy Greek. I first fell in love with him through Barber's setting of Knoxville, Summer 1915, then I read his posthumous novel (which won him the Pulitzer) A Death in the Family. No other American writer writes like this. It is seductive, it is teasing, it is sometimes so convoluted and knotted it gives Henry James AND William Faulkner a run for their money. But in the end, the poetry blazes with a fierceness and an honesty that makes me forget to breathe. Many reviewers refer to what they felt the book was trying to get them to do, as if it were, somehow, coercive. I just hear the great poet and the great poetry of Knoxville, Summer of 1915 coming, twenty years away, with such a deafening roar that I'm glad I'm alive, if only for the privilege of dying in the presence of such American greatness.

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