



LET US NOW PRAISE
FAMOUS MEN

JAMES AGEE • WALKER EVANS

THE AMERICAN CLASSIC, IN
WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS, OF THREE
TENANT FAMILIES IN THE DEEP SOUTH

FEATURING STRIKING PHOTOGRAPHS NEWLY REPRODUCED FROM ARCHIVAL NEGATIVES

THREE TENANT FAMILIES

LET US NOW
PRAISE
FAMOUS MEN

James Agee • Walker Evans



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

Boston • New York

To those of whom the record is made.
In gratefulness and in love.

J. A.
W. E.

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Passages from this book appeared in *Common Sense*,
New Directions, and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Published nearly sixty years ago, LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS MEN stands as an undisputed American masterpiece, taking its

place alongside works by Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman. In a stunning blend of prose and images, this classic offers at once an unforgettable portrait of three tenant families in the Deep South and a larger meditation on human dignity and the American soul.

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. There they lived with three different families for a month; the result of their stay was an extraordinary collaboration, an unsparing record of place, of the people who shaped the land, and of the rhythm of their lives. Upon its first book publication in 1941, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was called intensely moving, unrelentingly honest. It described a mode of life — and rural poverty — that was unthinkable remote and tragic to most Americans, and yet for Agee and Evans, only extreme realism could serve to make the world fully aware of such circumstances. Today it stands as a poetic tract for its time, a haunting search for the human and religious meaning in the lives of true Southern heroes: in their waking, sleeping, eating; their work; their houses and children; and their endurance.

With an elegant design and a sixty-four-page photographic prologue of Evans's stunning images, reproduced from archival negatives, the new edition introduces the legendary author and photographer to a new generation. Both an invaluable part of the American heritage and a graceful tribute to the vibrant souls whose stories live in these pages, this book has profoundly changed our culture and our consciousness — and will continue to inspire for generations to come.



JAMES AGEE (1909–1955) won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *A Death in the Family*. Born in Knoxville, Tennessee, he worked as a reporter and critic for *Fortune*, *Time*, and *The Nation* and wrote for films and television. His other books include a volume of poems, *Permit Me Voyage*, the novel *The Morning Watch*, and several collections of correspondence, reviews, and film scripts.

WALKER EVANS (1903–1975) is best known for his striking Depression-era photographs. Born in St. Louis, he began his photographic career at twenty-five. He served as an editor for both *Time* and *Fortune* and was a professor of graphic arts at Yale. His other books include *American Photographs* and *Message from the Interior*.

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