

Robert Penn Warren

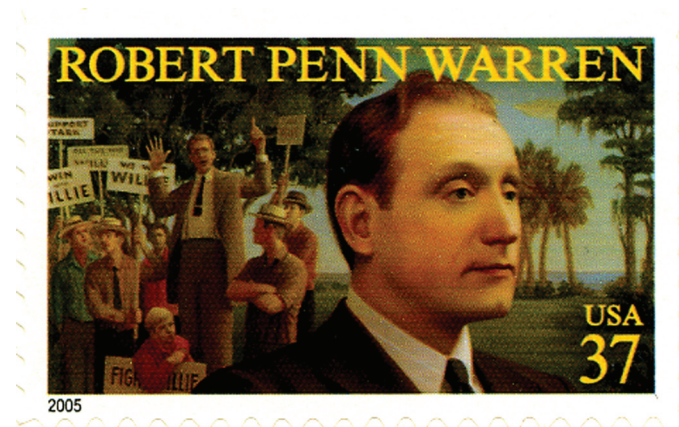
Author, poet (1905 – 1989)

Warren was a poet, novelist, and literary critic and was one of the founders of New Criticism. He was born in Guthrie, Kentucky and graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1925, and the University of California, Berkeley a year later. Warren later attended Yale University and was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University. He also received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study in Italy, and when he returned to the U.S., he began his teaching career at Southwestern College (now Rhodes College) in Memphis, Tennessee.

While still an undergraduate at Vanderbilt, Warren became associated with the group of poets there known as the Fugitives, and somewhat later, during the early 1930s, he and some of the same writers formed a group known as the Southern Agrarians. He contributed *The Briar Patch* to the Agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* along with 11 other Southern writers and poets (including fellow Vanderbilt poet/critics John Crowe Ransom, ALLEN TATE, and Donald Davidson). In *The Briar Patch* the young Warren defended racial segregation, a position he had recanted by the 1950s when he publicly supported racial integration. In 1965, he published *Who Speaks for the Negro*, a collection of interviews with black civil rights leaders, including Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.

He went on to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1947 for his best-known work, *All the King's Men*, whose main character was based on Louisiana governor Huey Long. Warren had a close view of the charismatic Long, having taught at LSU in Baton Rouge from 1933-42.

In 1974, the National Endowment for the Humanities selected Warren for the Jefferson Lecture. His talk was entitled "Poetry and Democracy," subsequently published under the title *Democracy and Poetry*. In 1981, Warren was selected as a MacArthur Fellow. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1957 and 1979, and was named the first Poet Laureate of the United States in 1986. Three years later, he died in Stratton, Vermont of complications from bone cancer.



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