

# William Faulkner: author, poet, and screenwriter

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William Faulkner, once stated ' Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world would do this, it would change the earth'. William Faulkner ties this concept into his literature in many of his novels including *Intruder in the Dust*, one of his most popular novels at the time it was published. The novel addresses the issue of civil rights for African Americans. William Faulkner writes about an African American man who is accused of killing a white man but refuses to defend himself in trial in an attempt to maintain his dignity. William Faulkner is known by many for his ability to write about many issues other authors tend to turn away from because Faulkner had an attentiveness to the politics of sexuality and race. William Faulkner was awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949, one of his greatest professional moments, which lead to more attention and interest in him and his works.

Faulkner was originally born as William Cuthbert Falkner on September 25th, 1897 in New Albany, Mississippi. His parents, Murry and Maud, named William after his great grandfather William Clark Falkner, who was a decorated Civil War hero and a bestselling author of ' *The White Rose of Memphis*'. Williams Great Grandfather influenced Faulkner through his life and it is shown later in his writings. William Falkner changed his last name after he tried to fight in World War I for the United States and was rejected due to being " small and frail". Falkner wanted to be a hero like his great grandfather, so he was determined to fight and joined the British Royal Air Force with forged papers as William Faulkner, which is why there is now a " u" in his name, born in Finchley, Middlesex, England.

In his early life, Faulkner's mother always supported him and she taught William to read before he started school and later introduced him to many writers including Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare. William's strongest emotional tie was with his childhood nurse Mammy Callie, who was a warm and loving woman who was born into slavery in 1840. She was a great storyteller and tales were rich in the rhythms of the Old South. Faulkner listened to every word she spoke and he unconsciously hoarded it away until decades later when he wrote about them in his novels. Faulkner's school life was complicated because when he was young he learned new material quickly and was naturally smart and he even skipped the second grade, but as he grew older he found school wasn't as challenging for him and he began to withdraw into a world of imagination instead of keeping up with his classes. William Faulkner decided to quit school after he almost failed the eleventh grade for the second time. Even though Faulkner never finished his high school career, with his veteran status he was able to enter the University of Mississippi in 1919. Faulkner began to act out a self-dramatizing role as a poet who had seen wartime service, and published poems and stories in his campus newspaper. Faulkner was even able to publish his first poem in 'The New Republic'. Faulkner left school once again three semesters in and began to work in a New York bookstore and after that as a postmaster at the university's post office in Oxford, but he was eventually asked to resign. This was because he would only sort the important looking mail every few days and would ignore or throw out everything else, and he would often close up early to go for walks in the woods. After Faulkner no longer worked he moved to New Orleans where he

began writing seriously. While in New Orleans, Faulkner started a friendship with Sherwood Anderson, a man who would later help him get his first novel published.

In Faulkner's works he focuses on four themes that hold importance to him and he uses them to tell a story. Faulkner talked about the racism in his novel *Light in August*. In the novel the question of racial identity, what it means to be biracial, and the problem of Southern racism is addressed as the main character, Joe Christmas, looks white, but is believed that he has some amount of black blood in him. Throughout the novel, this affects him in that he is both ashamed and proud of his black ancestry, but later in the novel he acknowledges that trying to come to terms with his racial identity is what has shaped his life. The novel deals with the question of whether Christmas racial identity crisis is a necessary result of his biracial blood, or whether it is instead a result of the societal definitions of race. Another theme evident in Faulkner's novels is slavery. Many of Faulkner's characters work under the stigma of slavery, giving rise to the idea that the institution is a curse to all people and to the nation as a whole. Faulkner began to condemn segregation in the south causing him to be outspoken on racial issues. Faulkner believed that the states should end segregation without the involvement of the federal government. He went on to publish "A Letter to the North" in 'Life' magazine in 1956, discussing this issue. While the population of the Deep South as a whole included approximately one black person for every two white, the ratio in Mississippi was nearly one to one. One biographer writes that 'loved the South but he hated what was being done to despoil its land and what had been done to its people as intolerance

allowed the color of a man's skin to determine where he must eat or ride or worship'. During this time period the black people were required to ride at the back of buses and trains so they were not near the white people, they were restricted from hospitals and schools that were not specifically for the blacks, denied the right to vote, and treated as if slavery was still in place. Faulkner hated seeing this and wanted to fight to see it come to an end.