



## American Humor: A Study of the National Character (New York Review Books Classics)

By Constance Rourke

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Stepping out of the darkness, the American emerges upon the stage of history as a new character, as puzzling to himself as to others. *American Humor*, Constance Rourke's pioneering "study of the national character," singles out the archetypal figures of the Yankee peddler, the backwoodsman, and the blackface minstrel to illuminate the fundamental role of popular culture in fashioning a distinctive American sensibility. A memorable performance in its own right, *American Humor* crackles with the jibes and jokes of generations while presenting a striking picture of a vagabond nation in perpetual self-pursuit. Davy Crockett and Henry James, Jim Crow and Emily Dickinson rub shoulders in a work that inspired such later critics as Pauline Kael and Lester Bangs and which still has much to say about the America of Bob Dylan and Thomas Pynchon, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

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### **Editorial Review**

#### Review

"The most original piece of investigation and interpretation that has appeared in American cultural history. It is in every way a brilliant book." — Lewis Mumford

#### About the Author

Constance Rourke (1885-1941) was a historian, anthropologist, and critic who revolutionized the study of American culture. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, and educated at Vassar and the Sorbonne, she spent most of her life in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Her influential studies of American life include *Trumpets of Jubilee* (1927), *Troupers of the Gold Coast* (1928), and biographies of Davy Crockett (1928), Audubon (1936), and Charles Sheeler: *Artist in the American Tradition* (1938). Her most famous work remains *American Humor: A Study of the National Character*, recognized as a classic from its publication in 1931. Rourke devoted her later life to "living research," exploring regional culture, from Shaker furniture to African-American song, and Western folk tales. She died in 1941, after falling on an icy porch.

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