

Nine White American Voices

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In a recent article entitled “[The American Political System and White Racial Discourse](#),” I suggested that White advocacy dialogue and debate

[m]ake room for American voices—Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and (I’m thinking out loud) Emerson and Thoreau and Mark Twain and Edgar Rice Burroughs (the Tarzan author) and Teddy Roosevelt and H.L. Mencken and . . . oh, I don’t know, just somebody besides Julius Evola, you know? American thinkers, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, Teddy Roosevelt, Ernest Hemingway, somebody.

In the week since—it’s now December 22nd—I’ve asked myself, “Who are White ‘somebodies’ you think ought to be heard?” Of course, the possibilities are virtually endless, but I’ve got to start somewhere and nine people come to mind at the moment: philosopher, essayist, and lecturer Ralph Waldo Emerson; novelist and short story writer Ernest Hemingway; Civil War combatant William T. Anderson; film director Sam Peckinpah; poet Emily Dickinson; artist and art educator Robert Henri; U.S. Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin; cartoonist Steve Ditko; and country singer Hank Williams. In that order, I’ll deal with them here to the extent I can given the space limitations I’m working with. You can Google and check Amazon and libraries to look into them further if you’d like.

As you read through this material, I invite you to be vigilant to what comes up for you: thoughts, feelings, images, memories, observations, insights, questions, issues, goals, things-that-need-to-

be-done. Get clear about all that, put words to it, and discern what significance, if any, it has for you.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) was an American essayist and lecturer. He was a prominent figure in an American form of philosophical idealism called Transcendentalism. His address to a Harvard audience in 1837, published with the title *The American Scholar*, has been called America’s “intellectual Declaration of Independence.” One of Emerson’s major writings is the essay *Self-Reliance*, which he included in a book published in 1842. Excerpts from that essay:

- To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men—that is genius. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light that flashes across his mind from within, more than the luster of bards and sages.
- There is a time in every man’s education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance, that imitation is suicide, that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him. A man is relieved and gay when he has put his heart into his work and done his best, but what he has said and done otherwise shall give him no peace.
- Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated in their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all

their being. We are now men and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny, not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

- Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness but must explore if it be goodness. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.
- Honor is venerable to us because it is no ephemera. It is always ancient virtue.
- Live no longer to the expectation of these deceived and deceiving people with whom we converse. Say to them, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. I will not hide my tastes or aversions. If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical intentions. If you are true but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly but humbly and truly. It is alike your interest, and mine, and all men's, however long we have dwelt in lies, to live in truth. Does this sound harsh today? You will soon love what is dictated by your nature as well as mine, and if we follow the truth, it will bring us out safe at last.
- Insist on yourself; never imitate. Your own gift you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation, but of the adopted talent of another you have only an extemporaneous half possession. That which one can do best, none but his Maker can teach him. Where is the master who could have taught Shakespeare? Where is the master who could have instructed Franklin, or Washington, or Bacon, or Newton?

- That which a man is does always by necessity acquire; and what a man acquires is living property, which does not wait upon the beck of rulers, or mobs, or revolutions, or fire, or storm, or bankruptcies, but perpetually renews itself wherever the man breathes. It is only as man puts off all foreign support and stands alone that I see him to be strong and to prevail. Nothing can bring you peace but yourself.

Ernest Hemingway

In both public and private writings, Ernest Hemingway increasingly reasserted his distaste for politicians, re-emphasized his abiding lack of faith in governmental solutions to social problems, and reaffirmed his personal and artistic independence from political parties and ideologies.

No one would call Hemingway a sophisticated political thinker, but novelist John Dos Passos was wrong to conclude that he had “no consistent political ideas.” From adolescence to old age, his ideas were remarkably consistent. They stemmed from main currents of American political thought—principally from the libertarian tradition of Jefferson and Emerson, salted by the philosophical pessimism of Alexander Hamilton and Henry Adams.

Hemingway agreed with Adams that power was poison. Like Jefferson, he welcomed integration into a small group or family or village and expounded the virtues of as little government as possible.

With the Transcendentalists, Hemingway thought that government could provide no panaceas for social ills. What was needed was a whole man, uncompartmentalized, unspecialized, a modern Thinking Man—a god to drive the half-gods out of the political arena as the great bullfighter would drive the fake messiahs from the bull ring.

Ideally, the individual man, like the individual family, should be left alone to confront his destiny. At the root of Hemingway’s support

for individual liberty lay a longing for a golden, mythical past in which each man—for him as for Jefferson, the self-sufficient man—lived free, unencumbered, and in harmony with nature. This ideal closely approximates the one Hemingway's heroes in his fiction seek but do not find, as the complicated modern restraints impinge and can only be escaped at the moment of death, when the heart that beat to the sway of the Gulf Stream or against the pine-needled floor of the Spanish forest stops.

Bloody Bill and Bloody Sam

A pro-Confederate guerrilla fighter during the Civil War, William T. Anderson unleashed untamed brutality toward Union soldiers and pro-Union partisans that prompted the nickname Bloody Bill. Film director and screenwriter Sam Peckinpah (1925–1984), whose explicit depiction of feral violence during the 1960s and '70s evoked controversy, was called Bloody Sam.

“You Federals have just killed six of my soldiers, scalped them, and left them on the prairie,” Bloody Bill declared. Earlier, federal troops had murdered his father and sister and destroyed the family property. “From this time forward, I ask no quarter and give none. Every federal soldier on whom I put my finger shall die like a dog.”

On September 27th, 1864, Anderson presided over the slaughter of federal troops in Centralia Missouri. Most all of the federal soldiers had been stripped naked and lay twisted and crooked in their death agonies, pinned down like bugs by bayonets, eyeless, earless and had dark oozing holes where their mouths had been. Many lay with heads flattened into mush or smashed open like melons. There were those with no heads, which had been cut off, stuck on rifle barrels, or placed atop fence posts and tree stumps like jack-o'-lanterns. If a corpse had a head, it was likely someone else's. Here and there were bodies lacking hands and feet or arms and legs. Worst of all was the naked body of a soldier whose genitals had been sawed off and

stuffed into his mouth. His contorted face testified that this had been done while he was alive.

Bloody Sam's film *Straw Dogs*, distributed in 1971, tells the story of an American academic David Sumner on a research grant in Cornwall, England. Sumner endures the ridicule, harassment, and cruelty of five men from the village who persist in the face of his posture of kindness and reasonableness and his attempts to placate and ingratiate them. Things escalate to the point that two of the men rape Sumner's wife and attack the house he is living in. The half hour climax of the film depicts Sumner slaughtering them all, one by one, the last by ramming his head into a giant animal trap and springing its jaws on his neck. Said Peckinpah, "David Sumner is a guy who finds out a few nasty secrets about the world and about his situation and about himself."

Emily Dickinson

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

Robert Henri

Robert Henri (1865–1929)—pronounced Hen-rye, birth name Robert Cozad—was an American painter. Shortly before his death, the Arts Council of New York chose him as one of the top three living American artists. Henri was also a popular and influential teacher of art. Henri's ideas on art, life, and education were compiled from lecture notes by a student, Margery Ryerson, in a book entitled *The Art Spirit*, though Henri is listed as the author. Below are excerpts from the book. Henri is not just talking about

someone who creates paintings or sculptures; he is talking about a way to live in the world regardless of one's vocation.

- The question of development of the art spirit in all walks of life interests me. I mean by this the development of individual judgment and taste, the love of work for the sake of doing things well, the tendency toward simplicity and order.
- When the art is alive in any person, whatever his kind of work may be, he becomes an inventive, searching, daring, self-expressive creature. He becomes interesting to other people. He disturbs, upsets, enlightens. He opens ways for a better understanding. Where those who are not artists are trying to close the book, he opens it. He shows that there are still more pages to be read and to be written.
- Artists do not forget the present in looking backward or forward. They are occupied wholly with the fulfillment of their own existence. Because they are engaged in the full play of their own existence, in their own growth, their fruit is bountiful.
- Artists should study their own individuality to the end of knowing their tastes. They should cultivate the pleasures so discovered and find the most direct means of expressing those pleasures to others and thereby enjoy them over and over again.
- An artist can't be honest unless he is wise. To be honest is to be just, and to be just is to realize the relative value of things. The faculties must play hard in order to seize the relative value of things.
- The best art the world has ever had was left by men who thought less of making great art than of living completely with all their faculties in the enjoyment of full play.

- Find out what is really important to you. Then sing your song. You will have something to sing about and your whole heart will be in the singing.
- What is life to you? What reasons and principles have you found? What are your deductions? What projections have you made? What excitement, what pleasure, do you get out of it? I should like to see every encouragement for those who are fighting to open new ways. I should like to see every living worker helped to do what he believes in the best he can.
- You have to make your statement of what is essential to you, an innate reality not a surface reality. Choose things seen and use them to make your statement.
- Reduce everything you see to the utmost simplicity. Let nothing but the things that are of the utmost importance to you have any place.
- Each individual needs to wake up and discover himself as a human being with needs of his own. He needs to look about, to learn from all sources, to look within, and to invent for himself a vehicle for self-expression.
- An artist must educate himself. He cannot be educated. He must test things out as they apply to himself. His life is one long investigation of things and his own reactions to them.
- All art that is worthwhile is a record of intense life. Each artist's work is a record of his special effort, his search, his findings, in language that best expresses that. The significance of his work can only be understood by careful study: no crack-judgments; looking for the expected won't do; and we can't even trust the critics with the best reputations.

- The real artists are too busy with just being and growing and acting like themselves to worry about the end. The end will be as it is. Their object is intense living, fulfillment.

Jeannette Rankin

Jeannette Rankin (1880–1973) was the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives to represent an at-large district in Montana. After she was elected, she said, "I may be the first woman member of Congress, but I won't be the last." She was the only member of Congress who voted against declaring war on Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor. When asked by incredulous interviewers how she could have done such a thing, she declared that war was a barbaric relic of the past and absurd and immoral, and that there are better ways to resolve international disputes than violence, and that she was not going to send mothers' sons to be blown to bits in some distant land. She was mocked and ridiculed and shunned and in the next election voted out of office.

Steve Ditko

Steve Ditko, who died in 2018, is deemed by cartoon insiders to have been one of the supreme stylists in the history of the form. In the 1960s, Ditko drew Spider-Man, and as time went along, made both character and plot contributions to the Spider-Man series. In his half-century career, Ditko worked on a number of other characters and series, including The Hulk, Iron Man, and Dr. Strange.

The success of the Spider-Man movies brought new prominence to Ditko's work among the general public. Then over eighty, Ditko was barely getting by on social security and a veteran's pension. He could have improved his financial stress by selling his original artwork and accepting private commissions to re-create his old work, but he would have none of that. To Steve Ditko, there was a right way to do things and a wrong way. It's one or the other, right

or wrong, period. Things aren't relative: what is right and true is right and true here, there, in the past, and now, and for you and me and everybody else, no qualifications, no exceptions. He was determined to do things the right way regardless of the negative consequences that may result. He refused to do anything that compromised his principles, his honor.

One's work should reflect the outer edge of one's current beliefs, insights, and commitments, thought Ditko. Recreations of his old work would have been going backward. When the Spider-Man films came out, he pressed for credit as the character's artist, but he didn't push for financial gain and made it clear that he had long since abandoned the character and was now engaged with other projects.

Ditko turned down lucrative work starting up the Star Line of children's books over the issue of whether being heroic is a decision rather than an inherent part of the make-up of a few special individuals that can be revealed but not chosen. He believed that being a hero isn't a matter of special grace, something you are born with à la Superman. Being a hero is something that every one of us can choose to become by the way we conduct our lives. Even though it will likely take rigorous preparation and diligent hard work and personal fortitude to become a hero, it is nevertheless possible for all of us, in our own way and in our own circumstance, to be heroic. We can do more than fall at the feet of heroes, insisted Ditko. We can become heroes ourselves.

Ditko was asked to work on a new series called Dark Dominion. Depicting the supernatural was a violation of his beliefs and he quickly ended his association with the project. He also turned down an assignment drawing the Transformer coloring book anthology because the central character for the series was a vampire. To Ditko, this life is it. What you see is all there is. What you do with this life is all there is going to be. What you accomplish in your private and public existence and its consequences is the only legacy you will ever leave.

A comic book organization scheduled a ceremony to give Ditko an award for a distinguished career in comics, but he refused to attend. He was honored in absentia, and without his knowledge or approval, someone accepted the award on his behalf. Thinking Ditko would be pleased, the person who accepted the award sent it to him. Ditko phoned him and said, "Awards bleed the artist and make us compete against each other. How dare you accept this on my behalf!" Ditko sent the award back.

Ditko, very old, and unwell, to the end, sat every day at his drawing board drawing pictures the best he could, in the most honest way he could, and self-published them. He could have been working for major publishing outlets that had the resources to promote and distribute his creations effectively, but they wouldn't do it in a way he believed in. With no mainstream publishing outlet, very few people would get to see his work, but he did it anyway.

Hank Williams

Hear that lonesome whippoorwill
He sounds too blue to fly
The midnight train is whining low
I'm so lonesome I could cry

I've never seen a night so long
When time goes crawling by
The moon just went behind the clouds
To hide its face and cry

Did you ever see a robin weep
When leaves begin to die?
Like me, he's lost the will to live
I'm so lonesome I could cry

The silence of a falling star
Lights up a purple sky

And as I wonder where you are
I'm so lonesome I could cry