

The Incendiary Arts of H. L. Mencken

Iowa City, IA—As American journalism shape-shifts into multimedia pandemonium and seems to diminish rapidly in influence and integrity, the controversial career of H. L. Mencken is a critical text for anyone concerned with the balance of power between the free press, the government, and the corporate plutocracy. Mencken was not only the most outspoken pundit of his day but also, by far, the most widely read, and according to many critics the most gifted American writer ever nurtured in a newsroom.

Nearly 60 years after his death, Mencken's memory and monumental verbal legacy rest largely in the hands of literary scholars and historians, to whom he will always be a curious figure, unchecked and alien and not a little distasteful. Hal Crowther, who followed in many of Mencken's footsteps as a reporter, magazine editor, literary critic, and political columnist, focuses on Mencken the creator, the observer who turned his impressions and prejudices into an inimitable group portrait of America, painted in prose that charms and glowers and endures. Crowther, himself a working polemicist who was awarded the *Baltimore Sun's* Mencken prize for truculent commentary, examines the origin of Mencken's thunderbolts—where and how they were manufactured, rather than where and on whom they landed.

Crowther argues that loving or hating him is scarcely relevant. The point is that he mattered, at one time enormously, and had a lasting effect on the national conversation. No writer can afford to ignore his craftsmanship or success, or fail to be fascinated by his strange mind and the world that produced it. This book is a tribute—though by no means a loving one—to a giant from one of his bastard sons.

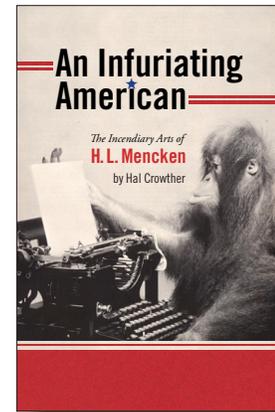
Praise

"This is the sort of book H. L. Mencken himself would have written if he had set out to do a study of an earlier American writer—a book that is essentially an extended essay, insightful, witty, and very readable, one that gets at the meaning of Mencken better than many other books that are five times longer. Crowther gets Mencken just right, understands him fully, tells his story beautifully."—Fred Hobson, author, *Mencken: A Life*

"H. L. Mencken was the perpetrator of some of the gaudiest tirades ever written in the great American language. He was a master of gale force invective and gobsmacking insult, a writer who leaves his readers laughing and appalled. Hal Crowther, one of the best American journalists of our time, brings Mencken roaring back to life in this compulsively readable and unforgettable portrait—and perp walk—of America's fulminator-in-chief. *An Infuriating American* is a splendid achievement."—Robert D. Richardson, author, *First We Read, Then We Write: Emerson on the Creative Process*

Hal Crowther is a critic and essayist, and a former syndicated columnist and newsmagazine editor at *Time* and *Newsweek*. His most recent collection of essays, *Gather at the River*, was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle prize in criticism. His syndicated columns won the *Baltimore Sun's* H. L. Mencken Writing Award in 1992. He is also the author of *Unarmed But Dangerous* and *Cathedrals of Kudzu: A Personal Landscape of the South*, winner of the Lillian Smith Book Award for commentary and the Fellowship Prize from the Fellowship of Southern Writers. He lives in Hillsborough, North Carolina, with his wife, the novelist Lee Smith.

An Infuriating American is available for sale at bookstores or directly from the University of Iowa Press at 800-621-2736 or www.uiowapress.org. Customers in the United Kingdom, Europe, the Middle East, or Africa may order from the Eurospan Group at www.eurospanbookstore.com.



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