



Lives We Carry with Us: Profiles of Moral Courage

Robert Coles

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Lives We Carry with Us gathers together for the first time a diverse cross section of Coles's profiles, originally published in our premier magazines over the span of five decades but never before collected in book form. Depicting the famous, the lesser known, and the unknown, the profiles here include portraits of James Agee, Dorothy Day, Erik Erikson, Dorothea Lange, Walker Percy, Bruce Springsteen, Simone Weil, and William Carlos Williams among others. Coles has chosen figures whom he considers his guardian spirits—individuals who shaped, challenged, and inspired one of the great moral voices of our era.

Profiles include:

James Rufus Agee (1909 – 1955) was one of the most influential film critics in the U.S. He was the author of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (to which he contributed the text and Walker Evans contributed the photographs) which grew out of an assignment the two men accepted in 1936 to produce a magazine article on the conditions among white sharecropper families in the American South. His autobiographical novel, *A Death in the Family* (1957), won the author a posthumous Pulitzer Prize.

Simone Weil (1909 – 1943) was a French philosopher, activist, and religious searcher, whose death in 1943 was hastened by starvation. Weil published during her lifetime only a few poems and articles. With her posthumous works --16 volumes in all -- Weil has earned a reputation as one of the most original thinkers of her era. T.S. Eliot described her as "a woman of genius, of a kind of genius akin to that of the saints."

William Carlos Williams (1883 – 1963), was an American poet who was also a pediatrician and general practitioner of medicine. Williams "worked harder at being a writer than he did at being a physician," wrote biographer Linda Wagner-Martin; but during his long lifetime, Williams excelled at both. He considered himself a socialist and opponent of capitalism and is probably spinning in his grave at the current state of things, economically and socially. One of his best known poems is an "apology poem" taught to most American children in elementary school called "This Is Just to Say" : "I have eaten / the plums / that were in / the icebox / and which / you were probably /saving / for breakfast. / Forgive me / they were delicious / so sweet /and so cold."

Dorothy Day (1897 – 1980) was an American journalist and social activist who became most famous for founding, with Peter Maurin, the Catholic Worker movement, a nonviolent, pacifist movement which combines direct aid for the poor and homeless with nonviolent direct action on their behalf.

Dorothea Lange (1895 – 1965) was a hugely influential American documentary photographer and photojournalist, best known for her Depression-era work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Lange's photographs humanized the tragic consequences of the Great Depression and profoundly influenced the development of documentary photography, one of Robert Coles' great passions.

Erik Erikson (1902 – 1994) was a Danish-German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theories on social development of human beings. He may be most famous for coining the phrase "identity crisis." Erikson's greatest innovation was to postulate not five stages of development, as Freud has done with his psychosexual stages, but eight. Erik Erikson believed that every human being goes through a certain number of stages to reach his or her full development, theorizing eight stages, that a human being goes through from birth to death.

Walker Percy (1916 – 1990) was an American southern author best known for his philosophical novels set in and around New Orleans, the first of which, *The Moviegoer*, won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1962. He devoted his literary life to the exploration of "the dislocation of man in the modern age." His work displays a unique combination of existential questioning, Southern sensibility, and deep Catholic faith -- all themes of great interest to Coles.

Bruce Frederick Joseph Springsteen (born September 23, 1949), has long been in Robert Coles' orbit and he once held a concert as a fundraiser for Coles' magazine *Double Take* (now defunct). Springsteen's most successful studio albums, *Born to Run* and *Born in the U.S.A.*, epitomize his penchant for finding grandeur in the struggles of daily life in America, and the latter album made him one of the most recognized artists of the 1980s within the United States.

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Kimberly Plummer:

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