Henry Woodfin Grady Biography

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Biography

Henry Woodfin Grady (1850-1889) was the foremost American journalist of the "New South"--a term he invented--and a renowned orator.

A descendant of old native stock, Henry W. Grady was born May 24, 1850, in Athens, Ga. His father was killed during the Civil War. In 1868 Grady received a bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia. Pursuing postgraduate studies at the University of Virginia, he became interested in journalism. His first venture into newspaper work was a series of articles for the *Atlanta Constitution* on the resources and future possibilities of his war-ravaged state.

In the early 1870s, having married into a cotton goods-manufacturing family, Grady settled in Rome, Ga. Three attempts to establish his own newspaper failed within 5 months. In 1876 the dejected young man went to New York City in quest of work. A piece he wrote for the *New York Herald* was so well received that he returned to Georgia as the paper's special correspondent. Four years later, with a $20,000 loan from Cyrus W. Field, Grady purchased a quarter interest in the *Atlanta Constitution* and became its editor.

Grady's reputation soared, as did the circulation of the *Constitution,* which in 8 years became the most popular weekly in the nation. Grady did not hesitate to attack graft and corruption in Georgia. Yet he became more famous for his economic and political crusades. In brilliant oratory he preached the virtues of a "New South" and continually urged embittered Southerners to seek reconciliation with the North.

Grady launched a one-man drive for new industry in his region. A contemporary wrote that he did not "tamely promote enterprise and encourage industry; he vehemently fomented enterprise and provoked industry until they stalked through the land like armed conquerors." The South's slow but steady recovery from the destruction of the Civil War is a tribute in no small part to Grady's efforts.

Grady also launched a misguided political dream: to unite all Southern whites into one party and then amalgamate it with the financial and industrial combine of the East--with Atlanta as the base of operations. Though he was frequently mentioned as a prospect for the U.S. Senate, Grady avoided political office.

On Dec. 23, 1889, Grady died of pneumonia. A number of buildings and monuments in Atlanta commemorate his service to his city, his state, and the South he loved. In his own day Grady was considered "a genius born for an era."