American Mercury Encyclopedia Article

American Mercury

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Contents

American Mercury Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

American Mercury.....3

American Mercury

For about a decade the *American Mercury* magazine served as an irreverent cultural critic. The magazine's distinctive style came from the iconoclastic nature of its editor, Henry Louis (H. L.) Mencken. Under his leadership, the *Mercury*'s vitriolic attacks on mainstream American culture attracted a following among the intelligentsia and provoked controversy as well (censors tried to ban the April, 1926 issue).

The brainchild of publisher Alfred A. Knopf and journalist/social critic H. L. Mencken, the *Mercury* first appeared in 1924, and Mencken soon became the sole editor. The *Mercury* printed work by Charles Beard, W. J. Cash, Clarence Darrow, W. E. B. Du Bois, Emma Goldman, Langston Hughes, Eugene O'Neill, and Upton Sinclair, among others. In 1933, with readership falling off and his own interest in the magazine waning, Mencken relinquished the editorship. By the 1950s, after passing through a succession of owners and editors, the *Mercury* had degenerated into a racist, anti-semitic fringe publication. The magazine folded in 1980.

Further Reading:

Angoff, Charles. *H. L. Mencken: A Portrait from Memory.* New York, Thomas Yoseloff, 1956.

Hobson, Fred. *Mencken: A Life.* New York, Random House, 1994.

Mencken, H. L. *My Life as Author and Editor.* New York, Alfred A.Knopf, 1993.

Singleton, M. K. *H. L. Mencken and the American Mercury Adventure.* Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press, 1962.