

AMERICAN ORIGINALS: **Studies in American Biography**

When it comes to self-government, the concept of human freedom and the value of the individual, America is *sui generis* – without peer. This great cauldron of possibilities has also produced countless men and women of breathtaking talent and far-reaching accomplishment. One could argue that the gifts and talents of many – if not most – of these unique individuals could only have found voice in America.

These eight standalone lectures examine the lives and accomplishments of eight individuals who, as the title indicates, can truly be called “American originals.”

Lectures (eight):

1. **Mark Twain (1835-1910):** America’s favorite writer, bar none. Who else but Twain could begin a tale with the immortal words “My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian.”
2. **Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935):** Variouslly called “The Great Dissenter” and “The Justice From Beacon Hill,” Holmes was the quintessential Boston Brahmin. His life and career are the stuff of legend.
3. **Averell Harriman (1891- 1986):** One of the richest men in America, Harriman spent the first half of his life as a playboy. Who could have predicted that he would become one of America’s greatest diplomats?
4. **Edna Ferber (1887-1968):** Hailing from Kalamazoo, Michigan, Ferber became, arguably, America’s most popular and successful female writer, penning such classics as *Show Boat*, *Dinner at Eight*, *So Big*, and *The Ice House*.
5. **Ben Hecht (1893-1964):** A gritty reporter from Chicago, Hecht went on to write “. . . about half of all the entertaining films [ever] produced in Hollywood,” including *His Girl Friday*, *Some Like it Hot*, and *Strangers on a Train*.
6. **H.L. Mencken (1880-1956):** A Baltimore-based newspaperman, Mencken was once hailed as “. . . the most powerful personal influence on this whole generation of educated people.”
7. **Mabel Normand (1892-1930):** The “Queen of Silent Comedy” and Hollywood’s first “I don’t care girl,” Normand’s epitaph could easily have read “She jazzed herself into oblivion.”
8. **Hughie Long (1893-1935):** Known as “the Kingfish,” Long blazed a meteoric path across the American political horizon. Equal parts genius and demagogue, Long’s career, was cut short by an assassin’s bullet.