



# Shakespeare in America: An Anthology from the Revolution to Now: Library of America #251

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**Shakespeare in America: An Anthology from the Revolution to Now: Library of America #251** Various  
“The history of Shakespeare in America,” writes James Shapiro in his introduction to this groundbreaking anthology, “is also the history of America itself.” Shakespeare was a central, inescapable part of America’s literary inheritance, and a prism through which crucial American issues—revolution, slavery, war, social justice—were refracted and understood. In tracing the many surprising forms this influence took, Shapiro draws on many genres—poetry, fiction, essays, plays, memoirs, songs, speeches, letters, movie reviews, comedy routines—and on a remarkable range of American writers from Emerson, Melville, Lincoln, and Mark Twain to James Agee, John Berryman, Pauline Kael, and Cynthia Ozick. Americans of the revolutionary era ponder the question “to sign or not to sign;” Othello becomes the focal point of debates on race; the Astor Place riots, set off by a production of Macbeth, attest to the violent energies aroused by theatrical controversies; Jane Addams finds in King Lear a metaphor for American struggles between capital and labor. Orson Welles revolutionizes approaches to Shakespeare with his legendary productions of Macbeth and Julius Caesar; American actors from Charlotte Cushman and Ira Aldridge to John Barrymore, Paul Robeson, and Marlon Brando reimagine Shakespeare for each new era. The rich and tangled story of how Americans made Shakespeare their own is a literary and historical revelation. As a special feature, the book includes a foreword by Bill Clinton, among the latest in a long line of American presidents, including John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Abraham Lincoln, who, as the collection demonstrates, have turned to Shakespeare’s plays for inspiration.

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