

A Chance Meeting American Encounters by Rachel Cohen

A Chance Meeting: American Encounters

By: Rachel Cohen

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Weaving a tapestry of creativity and circumstance, this lauded chronicle of the many links and serendipitous meetings between giants of American culture—from Henry James to Gertrude Stein to Zora Neale Hurston to Marcel Duchamp—now includes a new afterword by the author. Rachel Cohen's *A Chance Meeting* is a dazzling group portrait that offers a striking new vision of the making and remaking of the American mind and imagination from the Civil War to the Vietnam War. How does the happenstance of daily life become history? Cohen shows us, describing a series of, now boldly, now subtly, transformative encounters between a wide and surprising range of Americans. A young Henry James has his portrait taken by the photographer Mathew Brady—Brady, who will receive Walt Whitman in his studio and depict General Grant on the battlefield. Later, W.E.B. Du Bois and his professor William James visit Helen Keller; Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz argue about photography; and Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston write a play together. Throughout, Cohen's narrative loops back and leaps forward with supreme agility, connecting, among others, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, Beauford Delaney, James Baldwin, and Richard Avedon. In *A Chance Meeting*, Rachel Cohen offers an abiding account of the continuing challenges and the astonishing achievements of American life.

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