



Testimony

By Charles Reznikoff, Eliot Weinberger

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A major work by an essential American poet, published in full for the first time.

Available again for the first time since 1978-and complete in one volume for the first time ever- Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony* is a lost masterpiece, a legendary book that stands alongside Louis Zukofsky's "A" and William Carlos Williams's Paterson as a milestone of modern American poetry. Taking as its raw material the voices of witnesses, victims, and perpetrators discovered by the author in criminal court transcripts, Reznikoff's book sets forth a stark panorama of late-19th- and early 20th-century America-the underside of the Gilded Age, beset by racism and casual violence, poverty and disease-in a radically stripped-down language of almost unbearable intensity. This edition also includes Reznikoff 's prose studies for the poem, unavailable to readers since the 1930s, and a new introduction by essayist Eliot Weinberger.

"[Testimony] is perhaps Reznikoff 's most important achievement as a poet. A quietly astonishing work . . . at once a kaleidoscope vision of American life and the ultimate test of Reznikoff's poetic principles . . ." - Paul Auster

"Reznikoff 's astonishingly engaging and quietly powerful work has been steadily gaining a passionate following. . . . Testimony is a chronicle of industrial accidents, domestic violence, racism. It tells the story of America's forgotten, those who suffer without redress, without name, without hope; yet the soul of these States is found in books like this; the acknowledgment of these peripheral stories turns a waste land into holy ground." - Charles Bernstein

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Editorial Review

Review

A brutal American epic...I know of nothing like it in literature. Based on thousands of pages of court records spanning three decades around the turn of the twentieth century, *Testimony* is a compilation of case summaries, a sequence of self-contained pieces...[Reznikoff] makes no comment, passes no judgment, and wants the facts to stand alone. And yet, despite the starkness and skimpiness of these narratives drawn from legal records, the underlying horror of the events on which they were based and the tragedies they caused comes through...Reznikoff's poetry is written in plain language the kind that cats and dogs can read, as Marianne Moore put it, a language freed of the sentiments and poetic verbiage that poetry inherited from the Romantics. I put it down as I see it, he told an interviewer...As for *Testimony*, if you've heard of found poetry, that brainchild of the Dadaists, then you are familiar with a claim that any mundane bit of writing (from a circus poster to bathroom graffiti) can, once taken out of its context and with little or no tinkering, become a poem, then, surely, what we have here is the first found epic poem. It certainly reads like one, with its huge cast of evildoers and victims, vast setting, and profusion of breathtaking stories...[*Testimony*] causes too much discomfort to those who prefer to know nothing about what goes on in the world. This may be precisely what Reznikoff intended with a book like this. Let whoever reads it be upset. --Charles Simic, *New York Review of Books*

...a bare and powerful record of human suffering and injustice...Reznikoff's great concern for man's inhumanity to man, and for sheer ill-fortune, makes *Testimony* both a painful book to read and at the same time a profoundly moving assertion of human worth, dignity, nobility, and promise. With the exception of *Holocaust*, it has no parallel in American writing. --The Poetry Foundation

About the Author

Charles Reznikoff was born in Brooklyn in 1894. He graduated from law school and was admitted to the bar, but never practiced, instead pursuing his writing. Between 1918 and 1961 he published twenty-three books of poetry and prose, gaining a wider readership in 1962, when New Directions published *By the Waters of Manhattan: Selected Verse*; a second selection, *By the Well of Living and Seeing*, was published by Black Sparrow in 1974, followed by the *Complete Poems* and *Holocaust*. Reznikoff died in 1975, at the age of eighty-one.

Eliot Weinberger is an acclaimed essayist, translator, and editor. His essays are collected in *Karmic Traces*, *An Elemental Thing*, *Oranges & Peanuts for Sale*, *Outside Stories*, *Works On Paper*, and *What Happened Here: Bush Chronicles* (all available from New Directions). His writing appears frequently in *The New York Review of Books* and *The London Review of Books*.

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