

PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide - An Ongoing Project

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Chapter 7: John Reed (1887-1920)

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Source: [Oregon Biographies - JR](#)

For John Silas Reed, the conservative, early twentieth century city of Portland could never be "prepared to understand his dreams" of social revolution and change. Born in 1887, Reed grew up in a stately Portland mansion, attended the Portland Youth Academy and later, boarding school. Fascinated with the travels of his uncle and the unfamiliar habits of his family's Chinese servant Lee Sing, Reed's early writings were inspired by his desire to see the world.

Praised for his poetry and writing skills, Reed graduated from Harvard in 1910 and began a career in journalism in New York. He wrote predominantly for leftist magazines and was celebrated among Greenwich Village radicals. Reed first gained prominence when he covered the 1911 Mexican revolution alongside revolutionary Pancho Villa. The event inspired his romanticized chronicle, *Insurgent Mexico*. In 1915, Reed toured Eastern Europe reporting on the atrocities and injustices of World War I. He became especially captivated with Russia and its potential for revolution, writing that Russians "are perhaps the most interesting human beings that exist."

Returning home in 1916, Reed was lonely and tired of war, but on a visit to Portland he met Louise Bryant. In Bryant, Reed found his intellectual match. They married in 1916 and departed for Russia to witness the Russian revolution. Reed's 1919 *Ten Days That Shook the World* was an account of the Bolshevik seizure of power. In 1920, Reed traveled back to the U.S. to coordinate a domestic Communist party. Upon his return to Russia he was imprisoned and held in solitary confinement in Finland. Later released to Russia, a sickly Reed reunited with Bryant, but was tragically stricken with typhus

John Reed died in October 1920. The only American ever buried at the Kremlin, Reed's idealism, intellect, and spirit would inspire radicals to form John Reed Clubs across the United States.

Source: [Oregon Biographies - JR](#)

Primary Works

The education of John Reed; selected writings. With an introductory essay by John Stuart. NY: International Publishers, 1955. PS3535.E2786 E3

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