



- *Activist*
- *Author*
- *Journalist*

## *Lillian Eugenia Smith*

1897–1966

### ***Inducted 1999***

She was controversial as many outspoken pioneers are, but she steadfastly maintained the strength of her beliefs: she was the first white woman in the South to write and speak openly against racism and segregation. In her acceptance speech for the Charles S. Johnson Award given by Fisk University in 1966, she summed up her life-long convictions by saying "Segregation is evil; there is no pattern of life which can dehumanize men as can the way of segregation."

Born in Jasper, Florida, Miss Smith moved to Georgia when she was 15. A talented musician, she was also a teacher. In her many years as director of the Laurel Falls Camp for girls in Clayton, Georgia, Lillian Smith had profound influence on hundreds of young girls by encouraging self honesty, kindness, and trust in addition to physical and intellectual development.

***"Segregation is evil; there is no pattern of life which can dehumanize men as can the way of segregation."***

– Lillian Eugenia Smith

Her writing career began with Pseudopodia, the small literary magazine she co-edited with Paula Snelling as an outlet for liberal writers. Miss Smith often contributed her own articles on race relations. She achieved national fame with the publication of *Strange Fruit*, which told the story of a love affair between a white boy and a black girl. The novel, banned in Boston as indecent, created a sensation in 1944. Nevertheless, the book was a best seller and was dramatized by Lillian and her sister, Esther, for Broadway the next year.

All Miss Smith's writings reflect her views on racism and the narrow-mindedness of people in general. Her non-fiction work includes *Killers of the Dream* (1949), *Memory of a Large Christmas* (1962) and *Now Is the Time* (1955). Miss Smith best put forth her ideas through fiction such as *The Journey* (1954), *One Hour* (1959), and *Our Faces, Our Words* (1964). She also wrote countless articles, pamphlets, and speeches. Following her death, two volumes of her writings were published: *The Winner Names the Age: A Collection of Writings* (1978) and *How Am I to be Heard?: Letters of Lillian*

Copyright ©2005 Georgia Women of Achievement, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Smith (1993).

Lillian Smith's views are clearly expressed in a 1956 letter to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., which she closed by saying, "My warmest greetings to you and to your congregation and to your people who are my people, too; for we are all one big human family. I pray that we shall soon in the South begin to act like one."

Lillian Smith used the power of the written word slowly and methodically to enact changes in the hearts and minds of her readers. For her literary contributions and exemplary efforts on behalf of justice and racial harmony, Lillian Eugenia Smith is named a Georgia Woman of Achievement.

### **Additional Resources**

**Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library**  
University of Georgia  
Athens, GA 30602  
(706) 542-3251