

JACK LONDON

*The Man  
Who Created  
White Fang*



The Editors of New Word City







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NEW WORD CITY

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“I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry-rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet.”

- Jack London

In his day, Jack London was the most famous and best-paid writer in the United States. In the tradition begun by **Mark Twain** and carried on by the likes of **Ernest Hemingway** and now **Jon Krakauer** and **Sebastian Junger**, Jack London was a self-invented celebrity - a dashing, romantic adventurer, often in the news, whose doings and words filled the newspapers. His commercial endorsements sold products ranging from grape juice to men’s suits. His many vocations included stints as a sailor, a hobo, an oyster pirate, a **Klondike gold**

**prospector**, a worker in a fish cannery, and a war correspondent. But his true calling was as a writer. He published in 51 books - novels, short stories, lectures, collections of articles - and penned thousands of letters. It is on this work, finally, that he will be judged, and he will come out well.

Nothing in London's life was unequivocal. He was a self-taught man whose lack of formal education gave him no coherent framework for his views. His convictions as a **socialist** were constantly at war with his frontier individualism; his appetite for the wild life belied his lofty principles. He empathized with underdogs ranging from Mexicans and **lepers** to the African-American boxer **Jack Johnson**, but uncritically accepted California prejudices about Asian immigration and "the yellow peril." To be fair, London was also living in a society whipped by change, where the frontier and its farms were giving way to big railroads, mining interests, and industry. His genius was to personify that brawling age as America's first working-class writer.

Jack London was born to unwed parents, or so it is believed, in San Francisco in 1876 (his birth certificate was lost in the **earthquake** and fire of 1906). His mother was Flora Wellman, who had left her wealthy family in Ohio to become a **spiritualist** and was living with William Chaney, an itinerant astrologer and evangelist. Chaney soon left the family, and the baby was cared for by a former slave named Virginia Prentiss, who London considered a second mother for the rest of his life. Flora then married John London, a **Civil War** veteran with two daughters, and the family eventually settled in Oakland, where London went to grade school.