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Autore	Wyatt David <1948->
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Nota di contenuto	The body and the corporation: Norris, Chambers -- Double consciousness: Johnson, Chesnutt, Du Bois, Washington -- Pioneering women: Austin, Eaton, Stein, Eliot, Williams, Cather -- Performing maleness: Hemingway -- Colored me: Toomer, Hurston -- The rumor of race: Faulkner -- The depression: Dreiser, Fitzgerald, Yesierska, Di Donato, Himes, Farrell, Steinbeck -- The second World War: Mori, Vonnegut, Pynchon, Silko, Hersey -- Civil rights: Wright, Gaines, Baldwin, Walker, King, Clark -- Love and separateness: Welty, Petry, Douglas, Mary Mccarthy, Friedan, Steinbeck -- Revolt and reaction: Mailer, Didion -- The postmodern: Shepard, Beattie, Carver, Delillo, Gaddis -- Studying war: Cormac Mccarthy, Herr -- Slavery and memory: Morrison -- Pa not pa: Kingston, Walker, Ellison, Lee, Rodriguez -- After innocence: Roth.
Sommario/riassunto	This work claims that the history of the nation is hidden in plain sight, within the pages of twentieth-century American literature. The author argues that the nation's fiction and nonfiction expose a "secret history" that cuts beneath the "straight histories" of our official accounts. And it does so by revealing personal stories of love, work, family, war, and interracial romance as they were lived out across the decades of the twentieth century. He reads authors both familiar and neglected,

examining "double consciousness" in the post Civil War era through works by Charles W. Chesnutt, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Booker T. Washington. He reveals aspects of the Depression in the fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Anzia Yezierska, and John Steinbeck. Period by period, the author's readings recover the felt sense of life as it was lived, opening dimensions of the critical issues of a given time. The rise of the women's movement, for example, is revived in new appraisals of works by Eudora Welty, Ann Petry, and Mary McCarthy. Running through the examination of individual works and times is his argument about reading itself. Reading is not a passive activity but an empathetic act of cocreation, what Faulkner calls "overpassing to love." Empathetic reading recognizes and relives the emotional, cultural, and political dimensions of an individual and collective past. And discovering a usable American past, as the author shows, enables us to confront the urgencies of our present moment.
