



**Grace Lumpkin** was born March 3, 1891, in Milledgeville, Georgia, as the ninth of eleven children. During her childhood, the family moved to Columbia, South Carolina, and then settled on a farm in Richland County about a decade later. From an early age, she witnessed the conditions of both black and white sharecroppers and laborers and sympathized with the field-hands on her father's farm. After working to support the family following her father's death, Lumpkin returned to Georgia and graduated from Brenau University in Gainesville in 1911.

In 1925, Lumpkin moved to New York where she worked at *The World Tomorrow* and then at *The New Masses*, an American Marxist magazine. She was sent shortly afterward to participate in the Communist-led Gastonia textile strike, which protested the minimal pay and working conditions at the Loray Mill in NC. By 1939, however, she became a disaffected Communist. Party members who had been her former acquaintances threatened to ruin her career as a writer if she wrote against the party, but this only encouraged her to expose what she then saw as the evils of Communism.

Living with mill workers and sharecroppers in the mountains of NC during many summers provided the inspiration for her first novel, *To Make My Bread* (1932), which tells the story of a family of Appalachian mountaineers enduring economic struggles during the Great Depression. Lumpkin apparently based this novel on the Gastonia textile strike in 1929. The book won the Gorky Prize in 1933. Like *To Make My Bread*, her second novel, *A Sign for Cain* (1935), has been called an example of literary social realism. This second work describes the attempts of an African-American protagonist who wants to organize all workers, regardless of race, to stand together against oppressive business owners. Her third novel, *The Wedding* (1939), focuses on the conflict between individuality and conformity to society's standards. Her fourth and final novel, *Full Circle* (1962), is aptly named because it reveals Lumpkin's own evolving stand against Communism.

Grace Lumpkin dedicated her final years to anti-Communist activities and traveled as a prominent lecturer until her death in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1980.

-Sarah Marie Williamson

*1996 Inductee  
to the  
South Carolina  
Academy of Authors*



*Image Courtesy [www.georgiaencyclopedia.org](http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org)*

*Grace Lumpkin*