



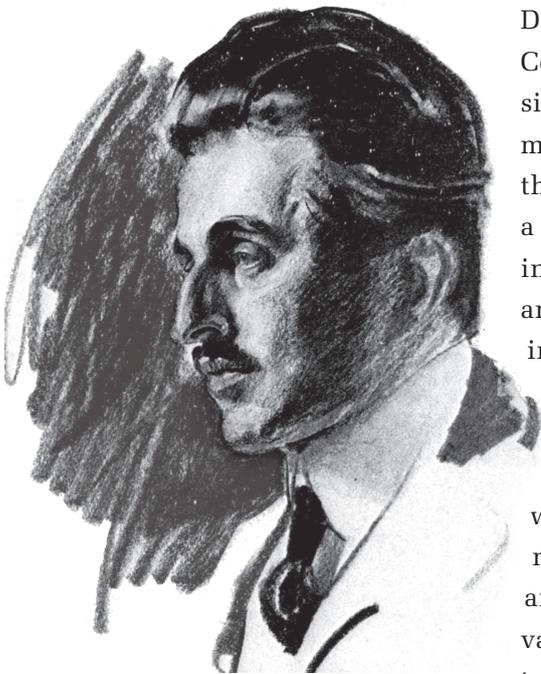
# Ameen Rihani

Poet

## Ameen Rihani's Bridge Between East and West

**A**meen Rihani (1876–1940) spent a lifetime bridging the worlds of the East and the West. Born in Lebanon, he immigrated to New York at the age of 11. He studied English and then joined the family merchant business. During this time he read Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Thomas Carlyle. Rihani attended the New York School of Law, but a lung infection cut short his studies and he returned to Lebanon to recover.

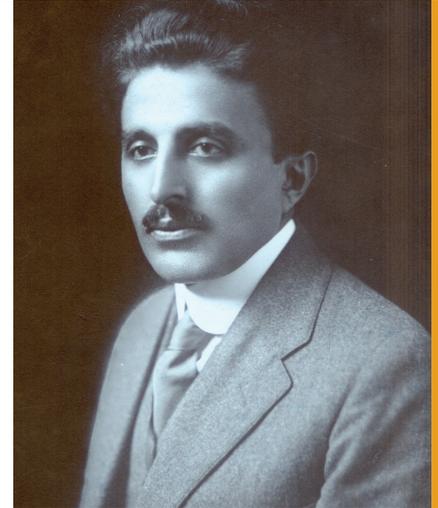
Returning to New York in 1899, Rihani



Ameen Rihani immigrated to New York City from Lebanon when he was 11 years old. He was a traveling actor and a law student before publishing *The Book of Khalid* in 1911. Manuscript division, Library of Congress

established himself as an innovative poet in both Arabic and English. (He introduced blank verse — unrhymed lines usually in iambic pentameter — to Arabic poetry.) He became an American citizen in 1901, but traveled between America and the Middle East all his life. In Lebanon, he wrote a collection of essays in Arabic as well as *The Book of Khalid*, thought to be the first English-language novel written by an Arab.

Mary-Jane Deeb, chief of the African and Middle Eastern Division at the Library of Congress, which held a symposium on *The Book of Khalid* to mark the 100th anniversary of the book's publication, said, "At a time when things are changing so rapidly in the Middle East and when you have young people in many of the countries of the region actually upholding some of those very ideas, that there is no East and West, that we're all part of a global community, that extremism is not the answer ... in a way those were the values that Ameen Rihani was talking about in his works." A new edition of *The Book of Khalid* is forthcoming from Syracuse University Press.



Courtesy of Project Khalid

Over the three decades following initial publication of *The Book of Khalid*, Rihani played an important role as an unofficial ambassador for American interests. He traveled frequently from America to the Middle East. He established a lifelong friendship with Ibn Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia, and he published a well-regarded series of travel books about the Arabian Peninsula.

"He dedicated his entire life to bridging East and West," his nephew Ramzi Rihani said, "and as much as he was an American living in New York and fully at home in America, he was fully at home in Lebanon. And Saudi Arabia. He was Christian by birth, but if you asked him his religion, he'd say, 'I'm an Arab American.'"

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