



EDITED BY GENE ANDREW JARRETT

THE WILEY BLACKWELL ANTHOLOGY OF

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

VOLUME 2: 1920 TO THE PRESENT

WILEY Blackwell



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The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature companion website features a wealth of resources created by the authors to help you use this book in university courses, whether you are an instructor or a student.

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- **Q & A with Gene Andrew Jarrett, Editor of *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature***
- **Guide to Literary Categories** provides an alternative thematic table of contents
- **Useful Websites for Students** featuring links to a host of companion multimedia materials
- **Key Issues and Themes** for each author and period, including questions for reflection
- **Glossary**
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- **Useful Websites for Instructors** featuring links to a host of multimedia materials useful for sparking classroom discussion
- **Key Issues and Themes with Teaching Suggestions** designed to help instructors build their syllabi and plan their class lectures
- **Sample Syllabi**

The Wiley Blackwell
Anthology of
African American
Literature

Volume 2

1920 TO THE PRESENT

EDITED BY GENE ANDREW JARRETT

WILEY Blackwell

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Preface

The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature is a comprehensive collection of poems, short stories, novellas, novels, plays, autobiographies, and essays authored by New World Africans and African Americans from the eighteenth century until the present. Published in two volumes, it is the first such anthology to be fundamentally conceived for both classroom and online education in the twenty-first century. Of equal importance, the anthology marks a special way of distinguishing the canon from the tradition of African American literature; a more diverse way of representing the lives and literatures of the African diaspora in the United States; and an advanced, if ironic, way of recognizing the ambivalent expressions of race not just in these first decades of the new millennium, but in generations long ago.

Admittedly, this two-volume anthology is presenting a canon. It argues that most of the texts of African American literature selected here have been – or should be – adopted, analyzed, written about, and taught within introductory and specialized courses. Yet this canon, like all useful canons, is provisional. It has incorporated the legendary authors who, after a period of obscurity, now deserve special recognition; and it has included the recent, emerging authors who have so upended traditional paradigms that they likewise warrant attention. Long-lasting literary anthologies earn the trust of teachers, students, and scholars by balancing the editorial projects of celebrating the best and welcoming the avant-garde of *belles lettres*. Aiming to join this hallowed group, *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* seeks to represent a canon that retains its

scholarly and pedagogical worth over time, with each subsequent edition.

In subtle but significant ways, the arrangement of literary works in this anthology does differ from what one is likely to discover in fellow anthologies. Evident in the chronological table of contents, the publication dates of literary works – as opposed to the dates on which the authors were born – determine the sequence in which the authors are introduced. (In only a few cases where multiple works by a single author are included, the initial publication date of the first work determines their collective placement in the anthology.) The rationale for this arrangement is straightforward. A handful of authors may share the same decade of birth and belong to the same generation, for example, but these facts do not guarantee that their major writings and publications will cluster in the same moment of literary history. Only six months in 1825 separate the births of Harriet E. Wilson and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, but over three decades separate Wilson's publication of *Our Nig* in 1859 and Harper's *Iola Leroy* in 1892. Periodizing literary works according to authorial birthdates also bodes poorly for those who had written multiple literary works across multiple historical periods. Although W.E.B. Du Bois had lived from 1868 to 1963, he published *Africa in Battle against Colonialism, Racism, Imperialism* in 1960, creating a potential discrepancy between the literary periodizations of his birthdate and one of the final works of his career. (The selection of Du Bois's writings for this anthology does not face as extreme a scenario, but he is, in fact, the only author included in both volumes to mitigate the problem of periodization posed by literary longevity.)

The birthdate periodization of literature also threatens to mischaracterize authors who released their best literature not exactly when their generational contemporaries were most productive and publicized. This scenario bespeaks the

legacy of Toni Morrison. Although her first three novels, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1974), and *Song of Solomon* (1977), appeared in the second half of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, she does not represent this movement as much as her 1931 birthdate would suggest. (By contrast, the other authors born in Morrison's decade of birth, such as LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Adrienne Kennedy, Larry Neal, and Sonia Sanchez, peaked in celebrity during this movement, with which they openly affiliated.) This anthology's renewed focus on the actual historical sequence and patterns of African American literature helps to redress the commonplace inconsistencies of canonical periodization.

After extensive instructional, scholarly, commercial, and collaborative research, reliable metrics have been developed to ensure that the texts readers encounter in the following pages are those that either are actually being adopted in the classroom in great numbers or have come to embody legitimate reasons why they should be. Copyright expenses and restrictions and practical word count limits posed the greatest challenges to fulfilling this anthology's mission of reprinting all the texts most ideal for teaching and learning. The data on course adoptions, commercial sales, scholarly citations, and historical acclaim (or lack thereof) helped to calibrate this anthology's selection of African American literature. The result is a list of authors whose statures are in proper proportion to each other and whose lives and literatures remain especially meaningful today. Regularly monitoring and adjusting these data over time will help keep as negligible as possible the divide between how teachers and students are examining African American literature in the classroom and how experts are doing so in the scholarly field.

Even if this anthology succeeds in harmonizing scholarship and pedagogy, the gamut of specialties intrinsic to each

mode of inquiry must be addressed. Scholars and teachers – and, by extension, students – are more specialized now than ever before. Specialties may include, first, a century or a movement in African American literature’s history, such as the “long” nineteenth or twentieth centuries, the New Negro Renaissance, modernism, postmodernism, or the contemporary period; second, a literary form or genre, as specific as poetry, drama, performance, or science fiction; and, third, a methodology such as diaspora, transnationalism, psychoanalysis, performance, print culture, or literary history. The stratification inherent to African American literary studies translates into the comparable stratifications of English and of African American/Africana curricula. The students who try to understand the diversity of courses emerging from these circumstances are also more predisposed than ever before to technologically advanced, multimedia, and online education.

The scholarly and pedagogic ecosystem of *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* has been carefully constructed and deeply integrated to meet the contemporary and evolving demands of educational specialization and technology. Along with the typical preface, volume introductions, period introductions, headnotes, textual annotations, glossary, and timeline, this anthology features after every author’s headnote a copious scholarly bibliography of articles, book chapters, books, and edited collections published recently (usually within the past two decades) and capturing the latest approaches to the author, the text, or the circumstances of literary production. This anthology features information pointing students and instructors to the website (www.wiley.com/go/jarrett). Maintained by Wiley Blackwell, the website will in turn refer to this anthology, yet it is also specially designed to enhance the experiences of readers with this anthology. In

addition, it will provide new material such as syllabi, classroom discussion questions and paper topics, reorganizations of the table of contents, audio and video links, links to Wiley Blackwell's own online library, and links to other relevant websites. The ecosystem includes the print and electronic versions of this anthology alongside Wiley Blackwell's *A Companion to African American Literature*, a comprehensive overview of the scholarly field from the eighteenth century to the present. Comprising close to 30 article-length essays and embracing the full range of African American literature, the collection explores this literature's forms, themes, genres, contexts, and major authors, while presenting the latest critical approaches. This ecosystem of scholarship and pedagogy are suited to take full advantage of the multiple ways in which African American literature is being consumed and circulated today.

Rare for a comprehensive anthology of African American literature, the structural division of *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* into two volumes advances the study of African American literature. (Previously, Howard University Press published *The New Cavalcade: African American Writing from 1760 to the Present*, edited by Arthur P. Davis, J. Saunders Redding, and Joyce Ann Joyce, in two volumes in 1991, but since then it has been out of print.) We are now in an age when introductory or survey courses on this literature, similar to those on broader American literature, are taught over multiple semesters, not just one. We are also in an age when specialized courses tend to revolve around historical periods far shorter than the sescentennial life of African American literature. The two-volume format of the print and electronic editions of this anthology ideally accounts for these changing circumstances.

Pedagogy and scholarship dictate today, just as they did during the academic maturation of American literature

anthologies in the 1970s and 1980s, that a comprehensive anthology of African American literature must be portable enough to cater to the specialized needs of teachers and students who may wish to mix and match each volume within a course. The two-volume format also enhances this anthology's self-sufficiency. Few, if any, competing anthologies reprint more long works than this one. Many of the selected works in Volume 1 alone – including those of John Marrant, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Harriet E. Wilson, Harriet Jacobs, Pauline E. Hopkins, Charles W. Chesnutt, W.E.B. Du Bois, and James Weldon Johnson – would have been excerpted for an anthology, but here they are reprinted in their entireties. Although facing at times exorbitant copyright expenses and gross restrictions, even Volume 2 exhibits a remarkable share of fully reprinted long works, such as those by Jean Toomer, Nella Larsen, Amiri Baraka, Adrienne Kennedy, August Wilson, and Rita Dove.

Logically and evenly split at the outset of the New Negro Renaissance, the two volumes of *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* mark an important step toward a refined organization of literary texts according to more appropriate periods of African American literary history, dividing them into seven sections that accurately depict intellectual, cultural, and political movements. Specifically, Volume 1 reprints African American literature from its beginnings to 1920; its three sections span the early national period, the antebellum and Civil War periods, and the New Negro period. Proceeding from 1920 to the present, Volume 2 includes four sections: the New Negro Renaissance; modernism and civil rights; nationalism and the Black Aesthetic; and the contemporary period. Showcasing the literature of 70 authors spread across both volumes, this may not be the largest anthology in terms of the number of pages. Nor may it be the most comprehensive in terms of the number of authors and texts.

Nonetheless, it encourages sustained, close reading to take advantage of its inclusion of not only more reprints of entire long works but also longer selections of major works than any other anthology of its kind. At the same time, this anthology concedes – as all anthologies do – that as much as it can function on its own to anchor introductory or specialized courses to assigned readings in African American literature, it still can serve to complement an instructor's independent adoption of separate books, whose large size, copyright costs, and page restrictions prohibit their inclusion in any anthology.

Concerned as it is with reprinting African American literature, this anthology of course affirms the political attitude of previous anthologies, even as it tries to pave a new road ahead. In recognizing African American literature as a crucial part of American literature, this anthology recalls the academic growth of early anthologies from, on the one hand, advocating for the inclusion of the “major writers of America” in English Department curricula toward, on the other, tailoring the canon to accommodate the historical and contemporary realities of “race,” among other categories of diversity. Over the years these comprehensive anthologies of American literature accumulated more and more African American writers who wrote literary texts that, with presumable racial authenticity, depict the underrepresented experiences of African Americans.

The 1990s marked a turning point. In this decade, a consensus of scholars and instructors argued rightly that this incremental accumulation of African American writers and experiences in the American canon practically did not – and theoretically could not – account for the centuries-long lives and literatures of New World Africans and African Americans. Comprehensive anthologies emerged to fill the void – both to declare a tradition of African American literature and, because they were indeed anthologies, to

represent a canon of this literature at the same time. *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* likewise asserts the centrality of race to the American canon; reaffirms the salience of New World African and African American experiences in United States (and world) literary history; and celebrates the comprehensive array of literary examples attesting to these qualities.

Yet this anthology resists the particular conflation of “tradition-building” and “canon formation” found in fellow comprehensive anthologies of African American literature. This conflation anoints texts with canonical significance only insofar as they attest to the traditional heritage and genealogy of “blackness,” such as the spirituals, gospel, work songs, folklore, the blues, proverbs, sermons, prayers, orations, jazz, black urban vernacular, and rap lyrics that people of African descent created, circulated, and consumed. It goes without saying that all comprehensive anthologies of African American literature should refer to the cultural traditions of the black vernacular. This one does as well. One cannot fully comprehend the selected writings of Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois without appreciating work songs and the spirituals; those of Phillis Wheatley, Jupiter Hammon, and Harriet Jacobs without proverbs, sermons, and prayers; those of Charles W. Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Zora Neale Hurston, and Alice Walker without folklore; those of James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Sterling A. Brown, and Michael S. Harper without jazz and the blues; and those of Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka, Lucille Clifton, and Gloria Naylor without codes of black urban vernacular. In this anthology, more connections and overlaps of this sort are made across African American literary history.

The fact remains, however, that contemporary specialists have now begun on their own to compile and republish examples of the black vernacular, providing readers with a

selection more copious, a background more thorough, than what is possible in even the most comprehensive anthologies of African American literature.¹ As these independent collections rightly continue to make the case that texts of black vernacular culture deserve more scholarly and classroom attention, *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* seeks to play a role more complementary than substitutive. Belletristic texts are selected here mainly for their pedagogic, scholarly, and intellectual value in literary studies, which, in countless cases, includes the black vernacular. But this approach is not preoccupied with justifying the canonical inclusion of any and all notable texts for the sake of reestablishing an authentic tradition of African American literature in the name of the black vernacular. African American literature is more complex and diverse than that. Indeed, the selected fiction and essays of Frank J. Webb, Jean Toomer, George S. Schuyler, Samuel Delany, Toni Morrison, and Charles S. Johnson unsettle traditional conceptions of race that presume the unvariegated quintessence of African American literature, experiences, communities, and politics.

The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature thus marks a new, long-awaited turn in the tone, structure, and purpose of canon formation. No longer must a comprehensive anthology sound an existential urgency to disprove condemnations of the tradition or canonicity of African American literature. No longer must it bear the burden of representing all versions of the written and spoken word communicated by “the race.” And no longer should it presume the hunger of contemporary readers for authentic racial self-reflection. Rather, this kind of anthology should delight in an ironic corpus of literature that, at one moment, asserts the shared diasporic experience and history of African Americans yet, at another, wonders whether this assertion rings hollow as often as it rings true.

In the new millennium, the ambivalent life, literature, and literary historiography of race demand this canonical turn.

Notes

¹ Specialized books republishing examples of the black vernacular include *The Anthology of Rap* (Yale University Press, 2010), edited by Adam Bradley and Andrew Du Bois; *African American Folktales: Stories from Black Traditions in the New World* (Pantheon, 1985), edited by Roger D. Abrahams; *Talkin' to Myself: Blues Lyrics, 1921-1942* (Routledge, 2005), edited by Michael Taft; *The Oxford Book of Spirituals* (Oxford University Press, 2002), edited by Moses Hogan; and *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), edited by Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas.