

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



AFRICAN  
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LITERATURE

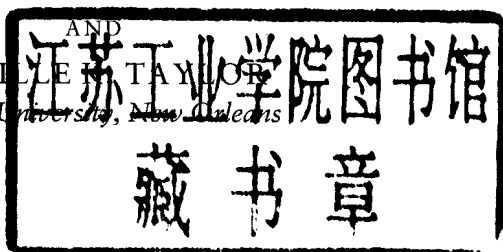
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*Edited by Angelyn Mitchell and  
Danille K. Taylor*

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AFRICAN AMERICAN  
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EDITED BY  
ANGELYN MITCHELL  
*Georgetown University, Washington, DC*

AND  
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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO  
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

*The Cambridge Companion to African American Women's Literature* covers a period dating back to the eighteenth century. These specially commissioned essays highlight the artistry, complexity and diversity of a literary tradition that ranges from Lucy Terry to Toni Morrison. A wide range of topics are addressed, from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts movement, and from the performing arts to popular fiction. Together, the essays provide an invaluable guide to a rich, complex tradition of women writers in conversation with each other as they critique American society and influence American letters. Accessible and vibrant, with the needs of undergraduate students in mind, this Companion will be of great interest to anybody who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of this important and vital area of American literature.

ANGELYN MITCHELL is Associate Professor of English and African American Studies, Georgetown University.

DANILLE K. TAYLOR is Dean of Humanities, Dillard University.

*A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book*

To our mothers,  
Gertrude Mann Taylor (1915-2005)  
and  
Evelyn Wiggins Mitchell,  
and  
to Adam Taylor Guthrie and Carille Mary Nicole Guthrie,  
my home-Mom

La vida es un carnaval! – Celia Cruz

## CONTRIBUTORS

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DANA A. WILLIAMS is an associate professor of English and director of undergraduate studies in the English department at Howard University. She is the author of “*In the Light of Likeness – Transformed*”: *The Literary Art of Leon Forrest* (2005), and she is the editor of *The Art of August Wilson and Black Aesthetics* (2004) and *Conversations with Leon Forrest* (2007).

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## CHRONOLOGY

- 1526 First Africans brought to North America.
- 1730 Lucy Terry thought to be born.
- 1746 Terry composes “Bars Fight,” the earliest known piece of literature by an African American.
- 1753–55 Phillis Wheatley thought to be born.
- 1757 Phillis Wheatley bought by John Wheatley in Boston.
- 1773 Phillis Wheatley publishes the first book by an African American, *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral*.
- 1775–83 The American Revolutionary War.
- 1775 In Philadelphia, the first antislavery society is formed.
- 1776 The Declaration of Independence is ratified.
- 1784 Death of Phillis Wheatley.
- 1787 The Three-fifths Compromise approved by Congress.
- 1791 Haitian Revolution begins.
- 1793 The first Fugitive Slave Law is passed by Congress.
- 1796 Lucy Terry, the first woman to argue before Supreme Court, wins her case.
- 1797 Sojourner Truth is born in New York.
- 1800 Gabriel Prosser’s revolt against slavery.
- 1804 Haiti established as the second independent nation in the Americas.

- 1808      The importation of enslaved Africans to the United States is prohibited.
- 1821      Death of Lucy Terry.
- 1822      Harriet Tubman thought to be born. Denmark Vessey's revolt against slavery.
- 1830      The end of the transatlantic slave trade.
- 1831      Nat Turner's revolt against slavery. Maria Stewart's "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build" published.
- 1832      Maria Stewart becomes the first American woman to participate in public political debates, on the lecture circuit in Boston.
- 1835      Maria Stewart, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*.
- 1836      *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*.
- 1841      Ann Plato, *Essays: Including Biographies and Miscellaneous Pieces of Prose and Poetry*.
- 1846      *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, and Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, an American Female of Colour*.
- 1849      Harriet Tubman emancipates herself and becomes a conductor on the Underground Railroad.
- 1850      The first recorded African American woman to receive a college degree, Lucy Session, graduates from Oberlin College. Sometime during this decade Hannah Crafts writes *The Bondwoman's Narrative*, possibly the first novel by an African American woman published in the United States. Sojourner Truth publishes her autobiography, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*, with the aid of Olive Gilbert.
- 1851      Sojourner Truth addresses the Ohio Women's Rights Convention with her now famous "And Ain't I a Woman?" speech.
- 1852      Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- 1853      Frances E. W. Harper publishes *Eliza Harris*.
- 1854      Frances E. W. Harper, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*.

- 1855 After being passed down orally for over one hundred years, Lucy Terry's poem, "Bars Fight," is published.
- 1857 In the Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court rules against African American citizenship.
- 1859 John Brown raids Harpers Ferry. Harriet Wilson enters the copyright for her novel, *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in A Two-Story White House, North. Showing That Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There*, generally believed to be the first novel by an African American published in the United States. Frances E. W. Harper publishes "The Two Offers," the first short story by an African American.
- 1861-65 The American Civil War.
- 1861 Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.
- 1862 President Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing enslaved African Americans in rebel states.
- 1864 The Fugitive Slave Laws are revoked.
- 1865 Black Codes are established, laws designed to restrict the rights of African Americans and to reestablish the social conditions of slavery. General Sherman's Field Order No. 15, allocating forty acres and a mule, sets aside land for newly emancipated African American families in the South. Mary Church Terrell is born. Terrell later works as a civil rights activist, lecturer, and suffragist. President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated. The Freedman's Bureau is established to attend to the needs of newly emancipated blacks. The Thirteenth Amendment is ratified, and enslaved African Americans are freed throughout the United States.
- 1866 Congress passes the first Civil Rights Act in order to counter the Black Codes.
- 1867 Frances E. W. Harper, *Sowing and Reaping: A Temperance Story*.
- 1868 The Fourteenth Amendment grants citizenship and "equal protection" under the law to all citizens, including African Americans. Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*.
- 1869 The National Women's Suffrage Association is founded.

- 1870 African American men's right to vote is protected under the Fifteenth Amendment.
- 1877 The end of Reconstruction is signaled by the removal of federal troops from the South.
- 1883 Death of Sojourner Truth.
- 1890 Amelia Johnson, *Clarence and Corinne or God's Way*.
- 1891 Lucy Delaney, *From the Darkness Cometh the Light*; Emma Dunham Kelley, *Megda*.
- 1892 Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South*; Frances E. W. Harper, *Iola Leroy*; Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*.
- 1895 Mary Church Terrell becomes the first African American woman to sit on the Washington, DC, Board of Education. Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, *Violets and Other Tales*; Emma Dunham Kelley, *Four Girls at Cottage City*; Ida Wells-Barnett publishes *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States*.
- 1896 The National Association of Colored Women is established. The Supreme Court ruling "separate but equal" in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case supports racial segregation in the United States.
- 1897 Death of Harriet Jacobs.
- 1899 Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*.
- 1900 Pauline E. Hopkins publishes *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*.
- 1902 Susie King Taylor, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp*.
- 1909 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded.
- 1910-30 Large numbers of African Americans move from the South to the North in "The Great Migration."
- 1910 *The Crisis*, the literary magazine of the NAACP, begins publication.

- 1913 Death of Harriet Tubman, legendary conductor of the Underground Railroad.
- 1914-18 World War I.
- 1914 Death of abolitionist Charlotte Forten Grimké.
- 1916 Angelina Weld Grimké's play *Rachel* is performed in Washington, DC.
- 1917 Gwendolyn Brooks is born. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.
- 1918 Georgia Douglas Johnson, *The Heart of a Woman and Other Poems*.
- 1919 High numbers of lynchings and race riots in the US, known as the "Red Summer of 1919."
- 1920 Women are granted voting rights by the Nineteenth Amendment. The beginning of what is known as the Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Renaissance.
- 1922 Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Bronze*.
- 1924 Jessie Fauset, *There Is Confusion*.
- 1925-27 *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* hold annual literary contests.
- 1925 Marita Bonner's essay "On Being Young – a Woman – and Colored" is published in *The Crisis*.
- 1926 Negro History Week begins. *Fire!*, a literary journal, is published by Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Wallace Thurman.
- 1927 Marita Bonner, *The Pot Maker*.
- 1928 Marita Bonner, *The Purple Flower*; Georgia Douglas Johnson, *An Autumn Love Cycle*; Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*.
- 1929 The Great Depression begins with the US stock market crash on "Black Tuesday." Marita Bonner, *Exit: An Illusion*; Jessie Fauset, *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral*; Nella Larsen, *Passing*.
- 1931 Toni Morrison is born. Nine black boys are accused of raping two white girls in Scottsboro, Alabama.
- 1932 Shirley Graham's play-turned-opera, *Tom-Tom: An Epic of Music and the Negro*, opens in Cleveland.

- 1934 Zora Neale Hurston publishes *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.
- 1935-40 Works Progress Administration (WPA) provides work for artists and writers.
- 1935 Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*.
- 1937 Death of blues singer Bessie Smith. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.
- 1938 Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*.
- 1939 Zora Neale Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*.
- 1940 Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*.
- 1941-45 US involvement in World War II.
- 1941 President Truman orders the desegregation of the Armed Forces and the federal government.
- 1942 Zora Neal Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*; Margaret Walker, *For My People*. Margaret Walker is the first African American poet to win a national award, the Yale Younger Poets Award.
- 1944 Katherine Dunham establishes the Katherine Dunham School of Dance in New York, a major African American cultural institution until its closing a decade later.
- 1945 Gwendolyn Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville*.
- 1946 Ann Petry's *The Street* is published; it later becomes the first novel by a black woman to sell more than a million copies.
- 1947 Octavia Butler is born. Ann Petry, *County Place*.
- 1948 Ntozake Shange is born. Dorothy West, *The Living Is Easy*.
- 1949 Gwendolyn Brooks, *Annie Allen*; Alice Childress, *Florence*; Ann Petry, *The Drugstore Cat*.
- 1950 Gwendolyn Brooks becomes the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize. Gloria Naylor is born. Edith Spurlock Sampson (1901-79) becomes the first African American to serve as a delegate to the United Nations. Bebe Moore Campbell is born.
- 1951 Terry McMillan is born. Rosa Guy (with John O. Killens) forms the Harlem Writers Guild.



- 1952 Rita Dove is born.
- 1953 Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha*; Ann Petry, *The Narrows*.
- 1954 *The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case overturns the *Plessy* ruling of “separate but equal.” Rosa Guy, *Venetian Blinds*.
- 1955 Emmett Till is abducted and murdered in August. In December Rosa Parks sparks the Montgomery Bus Boycott by refusing to give up her seat on a bus. Alice Childress wins Obie Award for *Trouble in Mind*.
- 1956 Gwendolyn Brooks, *Bronzeville Boys and Girls*; Billie Holiday, *Lady Sings the Blues*.
- 1957 Nine African American students are barred from attending school in Little Rock, Arkansas. Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) founded. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 signed by President Eisenhower provided additional protection for African American voters.
- 1959 Death of jazz legend Billie Holiday. Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* becomes the first play written by an African American woman on Broadway. Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*; May Miller, *Into the Clearing*.
- 1960 Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded. Death of Zora Neale Hurston.
- 1961 Death of Jessie Fauset, writer and literary editor of the *Crisis* (1919–26). Gwendolyn Brooks, *The Bean Eaters*; Paule Marshall, *Soul Clap Hands and Sing*.
- 1962 Georgia Douglas Johnson, *Share My World*.
- 1963 The March on Washington. Four little girls killed in Birmingham, Alabama. Medger Evers assassinated in Mississippi. President Kennedy assassinated in Texas.
- 1964 Martin Luther King, Jr. awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in the civil rights movement. Freedom Summer is launched after three civil rights workers are murdered in Mississippi. Adrienne Kennedy’s first play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, is produced. Ann Petry, *Tituba of Salem Village*; Kristin Hunter, *God Bless the Child*. Civil Rights Act of 1964 signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Death of Nella Larsen.