



EDITED BY GENE ANDREW JARRETT

THE WILEY BLACKWELL ANTHOLOGY OF

AFRICAN AMERICAN
LITERATURE

VOLUME 2: 1920 TO THE PRESENT

WILEY Blackwell

The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature

Volume 2

1920 TO THE PRESENT

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WILEY Blackwell

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www.wiley.com/go/jarrett

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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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 sestercentennial 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.

Introduction

Volume 2 of *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* reprints African American literature from around the end of World War I in the early twentieth century until the present day in the new millennium. Including 49 different writers, the volume settles into four chronological sections – the New Negro Renaissance; modernism, modernity, and civil rights; nationalism, militancy, and the Black Aesthetic; and the contemporary period. These sections illustrate the historical challenges African Americans faced, along with the artistic or intellectual creativity they demonstrated despite or because of these challenges, in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. Key topics include the aesthetic and political formations of African American literature against the backdrop of America’s technological modernization, its societal shifts from rural to urban regions, its economic oscillations between insolvency and solvency, its Cold War anxieties, the racial politics of its civic upheavals, and its postmodern meditations on race and ethnicity in the age of multiculturalism.

The first section of Volume 2, “The Literatures of the New Negro Renaissance,” includes selections of literature starting with the early poetry and fiction of Claude McKay in the 1910s and 1920s about Jamaica, Harlem, and Marseilles, and closing with the essays and fiction of Richard Wright in the 1930s and 1940s. Despite the strengthening of nationalism and isolationism, the massive transnational movement of capital, people, and information distinguished this period, as did the increased stratification, standardization, and industrialization of US society. Modernist American literature responded to these circumstances by alternately attacking tradition and transforming it: by challenging the conventions of storytelling and language, while demonstrating a vexed and ambivalent relationship to American popular culture and European high culture alike. For African Americans, modernism was conjoined with the Great Migration and the rebirth of the New Negro movement. They left rural segregation, violence, and discrimination for potential opportunity and dignity in Harlem, among other cities, where African Americans concentrated, major African American literary journals circulated, and the New Negro Renaissance primarily staked its fortunes. As the Roaring ’20s came to a close upon the 1929 stock market crash, American writers spearheaded a brand of social realism in which the desperation and dignity of common people in the face of socioeconomic travail became a salient theme. Socialism as a mode of political agitation also became an attractive alternative to industrial capitalism. In this vein, Richard Wright eventually emerged as a leading figure in the effort to reconcile racial nationalism and Marxism and thereby eclipse the New Negro

Renaissance. Works of political militancy embraced African American folk traditions in conjunction with the Marxist call for proletarian revolution.

The next section, "The Literatures of Modernism, Modernity, and Civil Rights," runs from Gwendolyn Brooks's books of poetry in the 1940s about African Americans in Chicago to Lorraine Hansberry's writing on the development of American theater by the 1950s. In these years, the United States ascended as the world's preeminent superpower in which Americans largely relished the era's material comforts, their own increased social mobility, and the national self-assurance of wielding unmatched economic and political power. But underneath prosperity and faith in American exceptionalism lurked civic unrest and the threat of nuclear war, while serious racial, gender, and class inequality persisted. The modern Civil Rights Movement emerged alongside Cold War anxieties over decolonization and the rise of the Soviet Union. Looming front and center on the domestic front was the struggle by African Americans and a growing number of their white supporters for full racial equality. During the war, America's racial system was under duress both domestically and internationally. African Americans pushed for racial equality on a global scale. Against this backdrop, African American writers in the 1940s drew on naturalism and Communist sympathies to indict America's system of racial humiliation, economic deprivation, and systemic inequality. A decade later the grim determinism of the protest novel gave way to nuanced genres of African American literature that incorporated jazz and the blues. Soon the rise of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience in the name of equality forced many African American writers and intellectuals to confront politics and speculate on their own roles in the Civil Rights Movement.

The third section, "The Literatures of Nationalism, Militancy, and the Black Aesthetic," covers the years from the 1960s political art and criticism of Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones) to the poetry of June Jordan in the mid-1970s. At this time, "Black Power" was a slogan representing the movement revolutionizing the cultural and political consciousness of African Americans. Black Power belonged to a broader political, if not radical, protest against social prejudices and institutional strictures in the United States. Anti-establishment rhetoric invigorated activists across the country, and the violent backlash that these revolutionary actions and symbols consistently elicited turned out to bolster the resurgence rather than the retreat of political conservatism. The partisanship and uncertainty of the 1960s and 1970s found some formal and thematic resonance in the postmodernism of American literature. Fragmented narratives, unreliable narrators, the dissolution of boundaries between "high" and "low" culture, and the blurring of fact and fiction all apply heavy doses of irony in the literary claim to truth. More importantly, the era was a fruitful one for authors seeking to reveal yet overcome the traditional ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, and region alternately or collectively relegated underrepresented experiences to the margins of society. Postmodernism also held an allure for African American literature, whose aesthetics could owe more to pastiche than to protest. Nonetheless, many African American writers and activists were convinced that a revolution was at hand. The nonviolent, direct action protest of the southern Civil Rights Movement, they believed, failed to solve the issues of urban poverty, inequality, segregation, and economic disrepair afflicting African American communities. The growing militancy of the Civil Rights Movement channeled the frustration of working-class African Americans through the cultural and political critiques waged in African American literature. The Black Arts legacy would continue in the academic field of Black Studies, the emergence of hip hop and rap music, and the ongoing appreciation of African American language and culture by contemporary scholars, historians, and critics.

The final section of Volume 2, "The Literatures of the Contemporary Period," spans from the science fiction of Samuel Delany in the early 1970s to the essay by Charles R. Johnson, published in the first decade of the new millennium, about how "the old black American narrative has outlived its usefulness." The broader cultural shift in America's post-Civil Rights era, from overt protests to pluralistic consensus, underwrites contemporary cultural and political declarations of "postracialism," in addition to intellectual questions about the nature and function of African American literature in an age when the categories of race and ethnicity, in particular, are no longer immutable and absolute. Multiculturalism and diversity had long been lightning rods of an increasing, almost insurmountable, partisan divide, yet these doctrines reflect the cultural reality of the United States at the outset of the twenty-first century. American literature published after 1975 reflects the increasing cultural, racial, sexual, and ethnic diversity of its writers and readership, even if, at times, the political implications or consequences of this diversity have been understated or muted in the literature itself. Even though American literature continues to be packaged and marketed according to ethnic categories and identity politics, the racial identities of contemporary writers and their writings are not as politicized, in the sense of agitation or protest, as they were decades ago, such as during the 1960s. African Americans have faced similar cultural and commercial conditions as those experienced by fellow ethnic American writers, although they responded in unique ways to the political conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s and the countervailing shift toward multicultural pluralism. The politics of African American literature thus has been alternately explicit and implicit. An irony of contemporary racism is that the image of the African American welfare queen emerged at the same time that a revolution in the practice and study of African American women's writing was taking place in the US academy. The Black Power and feminist movements of the 1970s provided space for African American women both within the literary establishment and at its margins. Contemporary African American writers have also been drawn toward such genres as speculative fiction, in which they could interrogate and deconstruct identity and do so unbound by the conventions of racial representation in canonical African American literature. The so-called Culture Wars have largely been decided in favor of diversity and multiculturalism, not only in human identity but also in literary forms. The "broad celebration" potentially defining African American literature at the dawn of the new millennium – whereby, as Charles R. Johnson puts it, one can witness "a fiction of increasing artistic and intellectual growth" – continues, even as he happens to assert elsewhere, indeed with equal fervor, that this growth may portend "the end of black American narrative."

Every section of Volume 2 contains a pedagogical and scholarly apparatus. Each has an introduction with three main goals: to paint in broad strokes the social, cultural, intellectual, political, economic, and international circumstances of the United States at a particular moment in history; outline briefly the relationship of these circumstances to the nature of American literature being written and published at that time; and, finally, to indicate the potential implications of these broader literary and historical forces on the formal and thematic principles of African American literature. Next, a biographical and critical headnote introduces each selected author, describing the full trajectory of the author's thinking and writing in order to put the selected text in proper perspective. After the headnote is a bibliography that advises teachers and students on the most relevant journal articles, book chapters, books, and edited collections of scholarly essays they should consider for "further reading." This scholarly bibliography has been honed down to recognize only scholarship published recently (such as within the past two decades) and specializing on the author or the selected text. The bibliography also almost always views as a complementary resource the

recent essays published in Wiley Blackwell's *A Companion to African American Literature*. Volume 2 is not the most comprehensive selection of African American literature published since 1920 – but it does not intend to be. Rather, the authors and texts, which, with few exceptions, are laid out in chronological order and selected with citation and commercial research in mind, together capture the complexity and range of African American literary history from the modern era to the present.

Principles of Selection and Editorial Procedures

The *Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* is carefully designed to incorporate as many reprints of entire works, and as many longer selections of major works, as possible. Between the genesis and publication of the anthology, multiple stages of peer-review assessed its mission, structure, contents, and viability. Professors at colleges and universities were consulted to comment on and help revise the anthology and its corresponding website, while the Editorial Advisory Board contributed deeper critical engagement with the anthology's principles of selection. The outcome of this collaboration is an anthology that, despite the breadth and depth afforded by its two-volume format, focuses not on being the most comprehensive collection of African American literature in terms of the number of authors and texts. Rather, it concentrates on encouraging instructors to cultivate the sustained, close reading of any combination of the 70 authors, but with recognition that students, teachers, and scholars are now more specialized than ever before in analyzing movements, genres, or methodologies. The anthology can function alone in introductory or specialized courses, and it can complement an instructor's independent adoption of separate books.

The principles of selection have sought to balance the availability of African American literature with its affordability. On the one hand, the anthology provides a representative yet diverse range of belletristic texts for literary study. The responses of external evaluators and of the Editorial Advisory Board, coupled with reliable metrics mined from extensive scholarly and commercial data, helped to refine the anthology's table of contents. The texts readers encounter in the following pages thus are actually being adopted in the classroom in great numbers. New archival discoveries and the discernible cultural turn in higher education toward realizing the ambivalent life, literature, and literary historiography of race also necessitate this anthology's implicit argument that certain other exemplary texts should likewise be adopted.

On the other hand, this anthology seeks to ensure that the purchase of one volume or both volumes of the anthology remains within the financial means of students. Editorial decisions to feature entire novels, plays, and collections of poems by individual authors inevitably faced the challenges of accounting for their large size in terms of word count; paying their copyright costs if in the private domain; and, in the latter case, accommodating copyright owners or their agents who understandably wish to winnow down the anthology's selection so that it does not detract from the separate, independent sales of these entire texts. Even on a smaller textual scale, such as the short stories and individual poems of renowned authors, these structural limitations

played a role in the editorial decision to include or exclude them. All comprehensive anthologies, past and present, have had to endure circumstances in which the pedagogic and intellectual arguments to include entire texts ran up against the practical and budgetary arguments to excerpt or exclude them. The current edition and format of *The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* represent the successful negotiation of these conditions. The comprehensive list of esteemed authors and texts is herein more available, affordable, and portable than ever before, for both classroom and online use.

Compiling and editing the selected literature followed a series of guidelines and procedures. The reprintings of primary texts largely hew to original editions. For the benefit of readers, the texts have been lightly edited to correct errors of spelling, punctuation, syntax, and capitalization born in the original editions. Where no semantic meaning is involved in the change, typographic elements have been made consistent across the volumes and arabic numbering has been used in preference to roman. Annotative footnotes (which are enumerated by the editor) occasionally include these corrections or translate incomprehensibly archaic language into contemporary form. More often, they define obscure words; explain complex or meaningful phrases; and trace the historical significance of individuals, groups, places, and events. When known, the year of first publication, which generally dictates the chronological order of the contents, follows each selection on the right-hand side, sometimes adjoined to the year of a subsequent, revised edition. If relevant, the year of composition is also provided on the left-hand side. Finally, in the table of contents, a bracketed title, which states a central theme or quotes a poem's first line, for example, is editorially provided in case the original primary text lacks a title.

Acknowledgments

The Wiley Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature was the most difficult editorial project I have ever taken up in my career. In the past I have compiled and reprinted the writings of canonical and obscure African American authors; edited and published the essays of contemporary scholars; and along the way dealt with the literary estates or agencies of authors whose works still exist in the private domain and require copyright permission for republication. Preparing this two-volume anthology demanded that I recall these experiences and endure them again. Doing so was equivalent to putting together multiple kinds of collections in one, and addressing a large group of collaborators and constituencies with varying interests and needs in this enterprise. Unenviable to some, this was no small task.

Yet multiple things helped bring everyone together, in the spirit of consensus and contribution. There was either a deep-seated admiration for the literatures of New World Africans and African Americans from centuries ago to the present; an ineluctable sense of belonging to, and support of, this historic community of writers; or an abiding commitment to examining and circulating this literary corpus on behalf of higher education both in the United States and around the world. Or, the sentiment included all the above. This shared focus inspired me as I tried to shepherd this project from inception to conclusion, as did the opportunity to work closely with great literary artists and critics, academic instructors, scholars, editors, and students.

Located in both England and the United States, an outstanding group of editors and staff at Wiley Blackwell advocated for this enormous and complex book, and I wish to thank them here. Emma Bennett, Executive Editor/Publisher of Literature, was receptive to my idea, first proposed in 2009, of a new comprehensive anthology of African American literature released in multivolume format. She was patient and considerate as we hammered out contractual details about the parameters and resources of the project. Our regular conversations since then were crucial to the anthology's current shape and focus. Ben Thatcher, Project Editor, skillfully managed the project's unwieldy materials. With an eye always to buoying my soul, he eloquently negotiated with copyright holders and literary estates and agencies so that I did not have to enter the fray. Deirdre Ilkson, Senior Development Editor, and Bridget Jennings, Senior Editorial Assistant, helped to usher the project to completion, especially in the final stages. Possessing a keen eye, Giles Flitney patiently copy-edited these very long volumes, and worked with me to resolve issues both big and small. Finally, Felicity Marsh managed the project with a steady hand that kept me at ease at all times.