

The Norton Anthology

# AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE



Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay

General Editors



# The Norton Anthology of African American Literature

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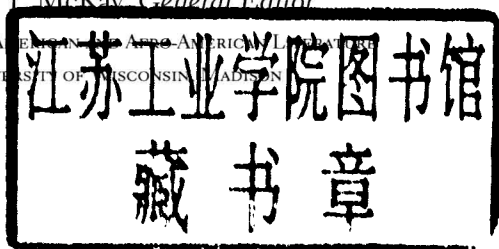
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The Norton Anthology  
of African American  
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# Preface

## Talking Books

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The lesson to be drawn from this cursory glance at what I may call the past, present and future of our Race Literature apart from its value as first beginnings, not only to us as a people but literature in general, is that unless earnest and systematic effort be made to procure and preserve for transmission to our successors, the records, books and various publications already produced by us, not only will the sturdy pioneers who paved the way and laid the foundation for our Race literature be robbed of their just due, but an irretrievable wrong will be inflicted upon the generations that shall come after us.

—VICTORIA EARLE MATTHEWS, 1895

In the history of the world's great literatures, few traditions have *origins* as curious as that created by African slaves and ex-slaves *writing in* the English language in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. In the stubbornly durable history of human slavery, it was only the black slaves in England and the United States who created a genre of literature that, at once, testified against their captors and bore witness to the urge to be free and literate, to embrace the European Enlightenment's dream of reason and the American Enlightenment's dream of civil liberty, wedded together gloriously in a great republic of letters.

For what could be more peculiar to the institution of human slavery than liberal learning, than "the arts and sciences," as the French philosophes put it? Slavery, as Lucius C. Matlock argued in 1845 in a review of Frederick Douglass's now classic *Narrative of the Life*, "naturally and necessarily" is "the enemy of literature." Despite that antagonistic relation, Matlock continued, slavery had by the middle of the nineteenth century "become the prolific theme of much that is profound in argument, sublime in poetry, and thrilling in narrative." What's more, he concluded with as much astonishment as satisfaction, "the soil of slavery itself"—and the demands for its abolition—had turned out to be an ironically fertile ground for the creation of a new literature, a literature indicting oppression, a literature created by the oppressed: "From the soil of slavery itself have sprung forth some of the most brilliant productions, whose logical levers will ultimately upheave and overthrow the system." It will be from "the pen of self-emancipated slaves," Matlock predicted, that "startling incidents authenticated, far excelling fiction in their touching pathos," will "secure the execrations of all good men and become a monument more enduring than marble, in testimony strong as sacred wit. . . ."

African American slaves, remarkably, sought to write themselves out of

slavery by mastering the Anglo-American belletristic tradition. To say that they did so against the greatest odds does not begin to suggest the heroic proportions that the task of registering a black voice in printed letters entailed. James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, the author of the first full-length black autobiography, *A narrative of the most remarkable particulars in the life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince* (1770), and the source of the genre of the slave narrative, accounted for this animosity, as well as the slave's anxiety before it, in the trope of the talking book:

[My Master] used to read prayers in public to the ship's crew every Sabbath day; and then I saw him read. I was never so surprised in my life, as when I saw the book talk to my master, for I thought it did as I observed him to look upon it, and move his lips. I wished it would do so with me. As soon as my master had done reading, I followed him to the place where he put the book, being mightily delighted with it, and when nobody saw me, I opened it, and put my ear down close upon it, in great hopes that it would say something to me; but I was sorry, and greatly disappointed, when I found that it would not speak. This thought immediately presented itself to me, that every body and every thing despised me because I was black.

The text of Western letters refused to speak to the person of African descent; paradoxically, we read about that refusal in a text created by that very person of African descent. In a very real sense, the Anglo-African literary tradition was created two centuries ago in order to demonstrate that persons of African descent possessed the requisite degrees of reason and wit to create literature, that they were, indeed, full and equal members of the community of rational, sentient beings, that they could, indeed, write. With Gronniosaw's *An African Prince*, a distinctively "African" voice registered its presence in the republic of letters; it was a text that both talked "black," and, through its unrelenting indictment of the institution of slavery, talked back.

Making the text "speak" in the full range of timbres that the African enslaved in England and America brought to the process of writing became the dominant urge of the ex-slave authors. So compelling did Gronniosaw's trope of the talking book prove to be that, between 1770 and 1815, no fewer than five authors of slave narratives used the same metaphor as a crucial scene of instruction to dramatize the author's own road to literacy, initially, and to authorship, ultimately. John Marrant in 1785, Cugoano in 1787, Equiano in 1789, and John Jea in 1815—all modified Gronniosaw's figure of the talking book as the signal structural element of their autobiographical narratives, thereby providing the formal links of repetition and revision that, in part, define any literary tradition. So related, in theme and structure, were these texts that by 1790 Gronniosaw's Dublin publisher also included John Marrant's *Narrative* on his list and advertised its sale on Gronniosaw's endpapers.

Still, the resistance even to the idea that an African could create litera-



ture was surprisingly resilient. As early as 1680, Morgan Godwyn, the self-described “Negro and Indian’s Advocate,” had accounted for the resistance in this way:

[a] disingenuous and unmanly *Position* had been formed; and privately (*as it were in the dark*) handed to and again, which is this, That the Negro’s though in their Figure they carry some resemblances of manhood, yet are indeed no men . . . the consideration of the shape and figure of our Negro’s Bodies, their Limbs and members; their Voice and Countenance, in all things according with other mens; together with their *Risibility* and *Discourse* (man’s *peculiar* Faculties) should be sufficient Conviction. How should they otherwise be capable of Trades, and other no less manly employments; as also of *Reading* and *Writing*, or show so much Discretion in management of Business; . . . but wherein (we know) that many of our People are *deficient*, were they not truly Men?

Godwyn’s account of the claims that Africans were not human beings and his use of the possession of reason and its manifestations through “Reading and Writing” to refute these claims were widely debated during the Enlightenment, generally at the African’s expense.

The putative relation between literacy and the quest for freedom provided the subtext for this larger debate over the African’s “place in nature,” his or her place in the great chain of being. Following the Stono Rebellion of 1739 in South Carolina, the largest uprising of slaves in the colonies before the American Revolution, legislators there enacted a draconian body of public laws, making two forms of literacy punishable by law: the mastery of letters, and the mastery of the drum. The law against literacy read as follows:

And *whereas* the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attending with great inconveniences; *Be it enacted*, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach, or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write; every such person or persons shall, for every offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money.

The law against the use of the talking drum was just as strong:

And for that as it is absolutely necessary to the safety of this Province, that all due care be taken to restrain the wanderings and meetings of negroes and other slaves, at all times, and more especially on Saturday nights, Sundays and other holidays, and their using and carrying wooden swords, and other mischievous and dangerous weapons, or using or keeping of drums, horns, or other loud instruments, which may call together or give sign or notice to one another of their wicked designs and purposes. . . . And whatsoever master, owner or overseer shall permit or suffer his or their negro or other slave or slaves, at any

time hereafter, or beat drums, blow horns, or use any other loud instruments, or whosoever shall suffer and countenance any public meetings or seatings or strange negroes or slaves in their plantations, shall forfeit 10 current money, for every such offence.

In the Stono Rebellion, both forms of literacy—of English letters and of the black vernacular—had been pivotal to the slave's capacity to rebel.

Writing, many philosophers argued in the Enlightenment, stood alone among the fine arts as the most salient repository of "genius," the visible sign of reason itself. In this subordinate role, however, writing, although secondary to reason, was nevertheless the *medium* of reason's expression. We *know* reason by its representations. Such representations could assume spoken or written form. Eighteenth-century European writers privileged *writing*—in their writings about Africans, at least—as the principal measure of the Africans' humanity, their capacity for progress, their very place in the great chain of being. As the Scottish philosopher David Hume put it in a footnote to the second edition of his widely read essay "Of National Characters":

I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient *Germans*, the present *Tartars*, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular.

Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen, in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are *negro* slaves dispersed all over *Europe*, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity; tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In *Jamaica* indeed they talk of one negro as a man of parts and learning [Francis Williams]; but 'tis likely he is admired for every slender accomplishment, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.

Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher, responding to Hume's essay a decade later, had this to say:

The negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from the countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praise-worthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is

the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color. The religion of fetishes so wide-spread among them is perhaps a sort of idolatry that sinks as deeply into the trifling as appears to be possible to human nature. A bird feather, a cow horn, a conch shell, or any other common object, as soon as it becomes consecrated by a few words, is an object of veneration and of invocation in swearing oaths. The blacks are very vain but in the Negro's way, and so talkative that they must be driven apart from each other with thrashings.

Thomas Jefferson, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), echoed this discourse in his disparaging remarks about Phillis Wheatley's book of poems:

Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry. Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but not poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion, indeed, has produced a Phillis Wheatley; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism.

To test assertions such as these, various Europeans and Americans educated young black slaves along with their own children. "El negro Juan Latino," who published three books of poetry in Latin between 1573 and 1585, was one of the earliest examples of such an experiment, followed by Wilhelm Amo, Jacobus Capitein, and Francis Williams, in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The first black person to publish a book of poetry in English, Phillis Wheatley, was also the subject of such an experiment. But whether Wheatley had the capacity to write, *herself*, poems of such accomplishment, was a matter of considerable controversy in Boston in 1773.

Let us imagine a scene. One bright morning in the spring of 1761, a young African girl walked demurely into the courthouse at Boston to undergo an oral examination, the results of which would determine the direction of her life and work. Perhaps she was shocked upon entering the appointed room. For there, gathered in a semicircle, sat eighteen of Boston's most notable citizens. Among them was John Erving, a prominent Boston merchant; the Reverend Charles Chauncey, pastor of the Tenth Congregational Church; and John Hancock, who would later gain fame for his signature on the Declaration of Independence. At the center of this group would have sat His Excellency, Thomas Hutchinson, governor of the colony, with Andrew Oliver, his lieutenant governor, close by his side.

Why had this august group been assembled? Why had it seen fit to summon this adolescent African woman, scarcely eighteen years old, before it? This group of "the most respectable characters in Boston," as it would later define itself, had assembled to question closely the African adolescent on the slender sheaf of poems that she claimed to have written by herself.

We can only speculate on the nature of the questions posed to the fledgling poet. Perhaps they asked her to identify and explain—for all to hear—exactly who were the Greek and Latin gods and poets alluded to so

frequently in her work. Perhaps they asked her to conjugate a verb in Latin, or even to translate randomly selected passages from the Latin, which she and her master, John Wheatley, claimed that she “had made some progress in.” Or perhaps they asked her to recite from memory key passages from the texts of John Milton and Alexander Pope, the two poets by whom the African seems to have been most directly influenced. We do not know.

We do know, however, that the African poet’s responses were more than sufficient to prompt these eighteen august gentlemen to compose, sign, and publish a two-paragraph “Attestation,” an open letter “To the Publick” that prefaces Phillis Wheatley’s book, and which reads in part:

We whose Names are under-written, do assure the World, that the POEMS specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe) written by PHILLIS, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from *Africa*, and has ever since been, and now is under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. She has been examined by some of the best Judges, and is thought qualified to write them.

So important was this document in securing a publisher for Phillis Wheatley’s poems that it forms the signal element in the prefatory matter printed in the opening pages of her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, which was issued in London in the fall of 1773 because Boston printers remained skeptical about her authorship and refused to publish the book. Without the printed “Attestation,” Phillis Wheatley’s publisher claimed, few would have believed that an African could possibly have written poetry all by herself. As the eighteen put the matter clearly in their letter, “Numbers would be ready to suspect they were not really the Writings of PHILLIS.”

This curious anecdote, surely one of the oddest oral examinations on record, is only a tiny part of a larger, and even more curious, episode in the Enlightenment. At least since the end of the seventeenth century, Europeans had wondered aloud whether or not the African “species of men,” as they most commonly put it, could ever create formal literature, could ever master “the arts and sciences.” If they could, the argument ran, then the African variety of humanity and the European variety were fundamentally related. If not, then it seemed clear that the African was destined by nature to be a slave, rightly relegated to a low place in the great chain of being, an ancient construct that arranged all of creation on a vertical scale ascending from plants, insects, and animals through human beings to the angels and God himself.

By 1750, the chain had become minutely calibrated; the human scale rose from “the lowliest Hottentot” (black South African) to “glorious Milton and Newton.” If blacks could write and publish imaginative literature, then they could, in effect, take a few “giant steps” up the chain of being, in a pernicious metaphysical game of “Mother, May I?” For example, reviewers of Wheatley’s book argued that the publication of her poems meant that the African was indeed a human being and should not be enslaved. Indeed, Wheatley herself was manumitted soon after her poems were published.

That which was only implicit in Wheatley's case would become explicit fifty years later. George Moses Horton had, by the mid 1820s, gained a considerable reputation at Chapel Hill as the "slave-poet." His master printed full-page advertisements in northern newspapers soliciting subscriptions for a book of Horton's poems and promising to exchange the slave's freedom for a sufficient return on sales of the book. Writing, for these slaves, was not only an activity of mind; it was also a commodity that gained them access to their full humanity—Horton literally bought freedom with his poems.

Two centuries separate the publication of Phillis Wheatley's curious book of poems and Toni Morrison's reception of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993. Morrison's success is part of a larger phenomenon. African American literature has been enjoying a renaissance in quality and quantity for the past decade or so, even vaster than the New Negro, or Harlem, Renaissance of the 1920s, spurred on to a significant extent since 1970 by the writings of African American women such as Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Rita Dove, Gloria Naylor, Jamaica Kincaid, and Terry McMillan, among a host of others. The number of literary prizes won by black authors in the past decade, including Pulitzer Prizes, National and American Book Awards, far exceeds the total number of such honors won by African Americans during the rest of the century. And several times since 1990, as many as three or four black authors have appeared simultaneously on the best-seller list of the *New York Times*. While the audience for this magnificent flowering of black literature crosses all racial boundaries, black readers have never been more numerous: in June 1996 the *Times* reported that African Americans purchase 160 million books a year.

This prominence in the marketplace has had its counterpart in the curriculum. Black literature courses have in the past two decades become a central part of the offerings in English departments and in departments of American studies, African American studies, and Women's studies. Maya Angelou's appearance at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993, the first poet to read at an inauguration since Robert Frost did so for John F. Kennedy in 1961, and Rita Dove's unprecedented two-term appointment as Poet Laureate of the United States are further signs of the pervasive presence of African American literature in American society, just as the sustained popularity of rap poetry has revitalized a "Spoken Word" movement in cafés, the postmodern end-of-the-century heir to poetry readings by Beats in the coffeehouses of the 1950s.

This broad acceptance of the authority of African American writing was, of course, not always the case. Leonard Deutsch, a professor of English at Marshall University, recalls the harsh resistance that greeted his request to write a Ph.D. dissertation on Ralph Ellison at Kent State University in 1970. When his prospectus was approved, a member of his thesis committee—a well-known Melville scholar—resigned in protest, arguing that

To write this dissertation is bad on two counts: for Len Deutsch himself, and subsequently for the university. A doctoral dissertation implies substance, weight (stuffiness often accompanying this), and spread, and not concentration upon the wings of a gnat. If it be con-

centration, the dissertation must by concentration bring together and sum-up worlds of thought and material—the dissertation as metonymy or synecdoche, which it generally is. One could, for instance, write about Hemingway, Faulkner, or Bellow (recently living or still kicking) because men like them have established a respectable and accepted corpus of work ranging sufficiently to call for comment.

Ellison's work, he concluded, was not of the stature to warrant being studied for a Ph.D. in English. Other stories of white professors and predominantly white institutions of higher education discouraging scholarly interests and careers in African American literature abound in contemporary academic folklore.

The resistance to the literary merits of black literature, as we have seen, has its origins in the Enlightenment and in the peculiar institution of slavery. The social and political uses to which this literature has been put have placed a tremendous burden on these writers, casting an author and her or his works in the role of synecdoche, a part standing for the ethnic whole, signifying who "the Negro" was, what his or her "inherent" intellectual potential might be, and whether or not the larger group was entitled to the full range of rights and responsibilities of American citizenship. Because of the perilous stature of African Americans in American society, their literature has suffered under tremendous extraliterary burdens.

Writing in the "Preface" to *An Anthology of American Negro Literature* (1929), V. F. Calverton, a Marxist critic, argued that black literature was primarily a reflection of the Negro's historical economic exploitation:

In a subtle way, Negro art and literature in America have had an *economic origin*. All that is original in Negro folk-lore, or singular in Negro spirituals and Blues, can be traced to the economic institution of slavery and its influence upon the Negro soul.

Richard Wright would echo these sentiments in his "Blueprint for Negro Writing," published in 1937. Calverton went on to argue that the Negro's music and folk art were never "purely imitative," and that black vernacular cultural forms were "definitely and unequivocally American," the only "original" American culture yet created. Wright, too, would repeat this claim. If black writers turned to their own vernacular traditions, he concluded, black literature could be as original and as compelling as black music and folklore. The literary movement of the 1920s, he maintained, was more important for what it implied about what historian Carter G. Woodson called "the public Negro mind" than for what it had contributed to the canon of the world's great literatures:

If this new literature of the Negro in America does not constitute a renaissance, it does signify rapid growth in racial art and culture. It is a growth that is as yet unfinished. Indeed we may say it illustrates a growth that in a dynamic sense has just begun. It indicates more than the rise of a literature. It marks the rise of an entire people.

Calverton's argument about the production of literary arts and "the rise of an entire people" echoed the eloquent argument that the poet James

Weldon Johnson had made in his important anthology, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, published in 1922, at the very beginning of the Harlem Renaissance. Johnson's preface remains one of the major critical essays on the nature and function of black literature. In it Johnson states explicitly what had been implicit in the critical reception of black literary production since Phillis Wheatley: blacks must create literature because it is, inevitably, a fundamental aspect of their larger struggle for civil rights, and it can never escape this role because it serves as *prima facie* evidence of the Negro's intellectual potential:

A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior.

Johnson here was drawing upon Ralph Waldo Emerson's claim (made in 1844 in his speech "On the Emancipation of the West Indies") about the necessity for blacks to contribute "an indispensable element" to the American nation's cultural mix before they would be granted full citizenship:

If the black man carries in his bosom an indispensable element of a new and coming civilization, for the sake of that element, no money, nor strength, nor circumstance can hurt him; he will survive and play his part. . . . The intellect—that is miraculous! Who has it, has the talisman. His skin and bones, though they were the color of night, are transparent, and the everlasting stars shine through with attractive beams.

In large part because of these extraliterary expectations—and because of the pernicious withholding of literary and formal education from blacks—African American literature did not come of age until well into this century. As Sylvestre C. Watkins put it in his *Anthology of American Negro Literature* (1944),

Negro history and Negro literature have maintained a very close relationship through the years. In his struggle for a better way of life, the Negro has, through necessity, made his literature a purposeful thing born of his great desire to become a full-fledged citizen of the United States. His late start did not allow him the pleasure of creating a new phrase, or a more beautiful expression. The struggle against ignorance, indifference and racial bigotry had first claim upon his time and energy.

Indeed, the tension inherent in the African American tradition between even the most private utterances of a poet such as Phillis Wheatley—whose mastery of the English language and whose grace under pressure as *the* synecdoche for the African in Western culture would merit for her a place in the canon, even if her work were not as layered as it is—and the political



uses to which those utterances are put obtains to this day. What is the “black voice” that Gronniosaw sought to place in his text? What, exactly, accounts for the “African” element in African American literature? What is the relation between vernacular literature, the blues, gospel, the sermon, and jazz and the formal African American literary tradition? And what relation does the canon of African American literature bear to that of the American tradition? To begin to address these questions, we and our nine colleagues decided to produce this anthology.

### *Principles of Selection*

*The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* is a celebration of two centuries of imaginative writing in English by persons of African descent in the United States. It is most certainly not the first anthology seeking to define the canon of African American literature. But it is the most comprehensive; its sheer scope and inclusiveness enable readers to trace the repetitions, tropes, and signifying that define the tradition.

Just as the eighteenth-century slave narrators revised the trope of the talking book, writers in the black tradition have repeated and revised figures, tropes, and themes in prior works, leading to formal links in a chain of tradition that connects the slave narratives to autobiographical strategies employed a full century later in works such as Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*, Claude Brown’s *Manchild in the Promised Land*, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Precisely because “blackness” is a socially constructed category, it must be learned through imitation, and its literary representations must also be learned in the same way—like jazz—through repetition and revision. The African American literary tradition exists as a formal entity because of this historical practice, which the editors of the monumental anthology *The Negro Caravan* (1944) called “a sort of literary inbreeding which causes Negro writers to be influenced by other Negroes more than should ordinarily be expected.” If Virginia Woolf was correct when she claimed that “books speak to other books,” it is also true that works of literature created by African Americans often extend, or signify upon, other works in the black tradition, structurally and thematically. Tracing these formal connections is the task of the teacher, and is most certainly a central function of this anthology.

If African American literature is flourishing dramatically at the end of the century, so too is the academic study of this field. Critical studies, anthologies, encyclopedias, companions, chronological histories, reprints, and reference works of all sorts are enabling us to reassemble the fragmented history of African American writing, buried so often in what one commentator in 1854 called “the ephemeral caskets” of periodical literature, pamphlets, occasional publications, and limited, even vanity, editions. This scholarly work of recovery will most likely end the cycle of each generation of scholars being forced to reinvent the proverbial wheel. Such duplication of effort has been the great curse confronting scholars of African American culture throughout this century. These tools—the collective scholarship of the last few decades—will enable future scholarship and creative learning.



*The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* builds upon a distinguished tradition of anthology editing that began at least as early as the mid-nineteenth century, with the publication of *Les cenelles*, *Coix de Poésies Indigenes* in New Orleans in 1845. These forays into canon formation—for every anthology defines a canon—were also acts of love, arduously grafted together under the most difficult circumstances. Often, a black writer's work exists today only because of his or her presence in a scarce or rare anthology. Robert Thomas Kerlin's superbly edited *Negro Poets and Their Poems* (1923), for example, includes works by poets such as J. Monrad Allen, Joshua Henry Jones Jr., Eva A. Jessye, Irvin W. Underhill, and Andre Razafkeriefo, whose works are seldom, if ever, taught or anthologized today. Today's canonical figures can often be another generation's amusing footnote to literary history.

The editors of this anthology have followed two dicta in making selections in their respective periods. The first dictum is a caution advised by the writer and social critic Victoria Earle Matthews in 1895 in her important speech "The Value of Race Literature":

Race literature does not mean things uttered in praise, thoughtless praise of ourselves, wherein each goose thinks her gosling a swan. We have had too much of this. . . . Race literature does mean though the preserving of all records of a Race, and thus cherishing the material saving from destruction and obliteration what is good, helpful and stimulating. But for our Race Literature, how will future generations know of the pioneers in Literature, our statesmen, soldiers, divines, musicians, artists, lawyers, critics, and scholars?

We have endeavored to choose for the Norton Anthology works of such a quality that they merit preservation and sustain classroom interest.

The second dictum, inspired by our friend and advisor M. H. Abrams, is to create an anthology that serves the classroom in a number of specific ways: (1) that the selections allow in-depth study of the *major* writers in the tradition; (2) that works be so far as feasible complete, and abundant enough to give instructors choices; (3) that introductions and annotation free the student from the need for reference books, so that the anthology can be read anywhere; (4) that each editor, while subject to agreed-upon guidelines, be allowed to keep his or her own distinctive voice; (5) that the anthology be comfortably portable, so students can carry it to class.

Our task, again as defined by M. H. Abrams, has been to bring together into one comprehensive anthology texts we believe to be indispensable for "the indispensable courses that introduce students to the unparalleled excellence and variety" of African American literature. Insofar as possible, we have included those texts necessary to teach, ideally, a survey course in African American literature. With the exceptions of the poetry of Jay Wright, Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and the short fiction of Gayl Jones, which could not be included here for reasons of copyright, our anthology contains the texts that, in the judgment of the editors, define the canon of African American literature at the present time.

Like several historically important anthologies—Kerlin's *Negro Poets*