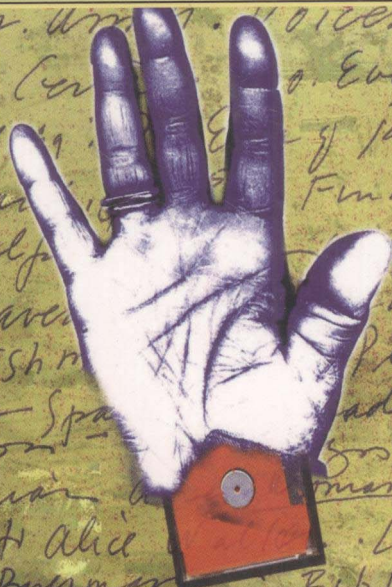


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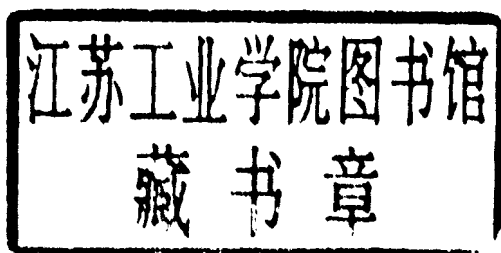
THE AFRICAN AMERICAN NOVEL

Edited by
Maryemma Graham



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THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN NOVEL

EDITED BY
MARYEMMA GRAHAM
University of Kansas



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CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR WORKS AND EVENTS,
1645–2000

- 1492 Columbus discovered the West Indies, opening markets for slave labor
- 1526 100 African slaves brought to the North American continent
- 1619 Jamestown, Virginia colony established with twenty Africans as indentured servants
- 1643 Sugar introduced into the West Indies, requiring slave labor
- 1645 Trade in African slaves begins in Boston, later to be known as the triangular trade between North/South America, Europe and Africa
- 1705 Slave code defines slave status: all Negro, mulatto and Indian non-Christians
- 1740 Comprehensive “Negro Act” denies slaves basic freedoms, including the right to read
- 1760 *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon*, considered the first dictated slave narrative in America
- 1773 Phillis Wheatley’s *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, first book published by a black slave in America
- 1775 First anti-slavery society organized in Philadelphia
- 1776 Colonies declare independence from Britain; Continental Congress votes against the importation of slaves in all thirteen united colonies
- 1793 First Fugitive Slave Act
- 1808 African slave trade officially ended in Britain
- 1816 American Colonization Society founded in Washington, DC to return freed slaves to Africa
- 1822 Denmark Vesey organizes slave revolt in Charleston, SC
- 1829 George Moses Horton, slave poet, publishes poems to purchase freedom; Mexico abolishes slavery and welcomes US fugitives

- 1830 International slave trade officially ends; illegal traffic in slaves continues
- 1830–60 Slave narratives become the most popular form of American literature
- 1831 Nat Turner leads slave revolt in Southhampton County, VA; Underground Railroad begins operation
- 1833 Oberlin College founded as first coeducational, racially integrated US college
- 1839 The *Amistad* revolt with fifty-three Africans led by Joseph Cinque
- 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*
- 1850s Hannah Crafts, *The Bondwoman's Narrative*, first novel by an African American woman; Congress passes second Fugitive Slave Act mandating all fugitive slaves be returned to their masters; massive fugitive slave hunts begin
- 1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly*
- 1853 William Wells Brown's *Clotel, or the President's Daughter*, first known African American novel
- 1857 *Dred Scott* decision; African Americans denied access to federal court system
- 1859 Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*
- 1859–62 *Anglo-African Magazine* published
- 1861–65 American Civil War
- 1861 Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, originally thought to be a fictitious narrative
- 1862 Emancipation Proclamation abolishes slavery in states fighting the Civil War
- 1865 13th Amendment passed, granting freedom to former slaves; Freedmen's Bureau and Freedman's Bank established; Ku Klux Klan formed in Pulaski, Tennessee; President Lincoln assassinated
- 1866 Civil Rights Act guarantees citizenship for all Americans
- 1867 Howard University founded in Washington, DC for former slaves; Reconstruction begins
- 1868 14th Amendment passed by Congress, granting African American citizenship and civil rights
- 1870 15th Amendment passed, granting the right to vote to African American male citizens
- 1877 Reconstruction ends

- 1881 Booker T. Washington founds Tuskegee Institute in Alabama
- 1883 Supreme Court repeals Civil Rights Act of 1866
- 1892 Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy; or, Shadows Uplifted*
- 1895 Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Exposition Address"
- 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case upholds separate but equal doctrine
- 1897 Alexander Crummell founds the American Negro Academy in Washington
- 1898 Grandfather clause introduced as voting requirement
- 1900 Charles Chesnutt's *House Behind the Cedars*; *Colored American Magazine* begins publishing as outlet for African American literature
- 1901 Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*
- 1903 W. E. B. Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*
- 1904 *Voice of the Negro* begins publication
- 1909 NAACP formed
- 1910–30 The Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North
- 1910 National Urban League formed; *The Crisis*, journal of the NAACP, founded by Du Bois, begins continuous publication; anti-lynching campaign begins
- 1911 Arthur A. Schomburg, bibliophile, founds Negro Society for Historical Research (later the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture)
- 1912 James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
- 1914–18 World War I
- 1915 Death of Booker T. Washington, considered the end of an era of black accommodation; Association for the Study of Negro Life and History founded by Carter G. Woodson
- 1916 *Journal of Negro History* begins continuous publication; *Opportunity* magazine founded by National Urban League
- 1917 *Messenger* magazine founded by A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen; Bolshevik Revolution in Russia
- 1919 Du Bois organizes first Pan African Congress; the "Red Summer," more than eighty lynchings and twenty-five race riots; Claude McKay, "If We Must Die"; Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"
- 1920 19th Amendment grants women the right to vote; Prohibition begins; Marcus Garvey's First International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World leads to the founding of the

- Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) to promote racial solidarity and return to Africa; The New Negro (Harlem) Renaissance begins
- 1922 *Shuffle Along*, black musical, brings African American culture to Broadway; T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*; James Joyce's *Ulysses*; Claude McKay's *Harlem Shadows*
- 1923 Jean Toomer's *Cane*
- 1924 Death of Lenin in Soviet Union; Jessie Fauset's *There Is Confusion*
- 1925–27 Literary contests sponsored by *Opportunity* and *Crisis* magazines
- 1925 Alain Locke's *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, official anthology of the Harlem Renaissance; Josephine Baker's *La Revue Nègre* (Paris); Theodore Dreiser's *American Tragedy*; F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; Countee Cullen's *Color*; 40,000 KKK parade in Washington, DC
- 1926 Langston Hughes's *The Weary Blues* and "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," considered manifesto for younger artists; Wallace Thurman's *Fire!! Devoted to Younger Negro Artists*; Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*; Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*; Negro History Week established
- 1927 Al Jolson appears in blackface in first talking movie, *The Jazz Singer*
- 1928 Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*; Nella Larsen's *Passing*
- 1929 US stock market crash, Great Depression begins; Wallace Thurman's *The Blacker the Berry*, William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*
- 1930 Langston Hughes's *Not Without Laughter*; Nine Scottsboro boys charged with raping two white girls; Black Muslims founded in Detroit
- 1931 George Schuyler's *Black No More*
- 1933 New Deal legislation; WPA (Works Progress Administration) begins, provides support for writers and artists
- 1934–37 *Challenge* and *New Challenge*, founded by Dorothy West and Richard Wright
- 1936 Arna Bontemps's *Black Thunder*
- 1937 Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; Richard Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Literature," groundbreaking critical article represents break with African American writers of the 1920s; Sterling Brown's *The Negro in American Fiction*
- 1939–45 World War II

- 1939 J. Saunders Redding's *To Make a Poet Black*, first critical study of African American poetry
- 1940 Richard Wright's *Native Son*; bestselling novel and Book-of-the-Month Club selection; era of the "protest novel" begins
- 1941 Armed Forces and government are desegregated; A. Philip Randolph threatens mass protest march
- 1942–51 *Negro Digest* founded by John H. Johnson, devoted exclusively to African American literature, reprints African American novels (resumes publication 1961–70)
- 1942 Margaret Walker's *For My People*; first black poet to win National Award
- 1944–46 *Negro Story* founded by Alice C. Browning
- 1945 Richard Wright's *Black Boy*; Chester Himes's *If He Hollers, Let Him Go*; *Ebony* magazine founded by John H. Johnson
- 1946 Anne Petry's *The Street*; Frank Yerby's *Foxes of Harrow*; Cold War begins
- 1948 Dorothy West's *The Living Is Easy*; Hugh Gloster's *Negro Voices in American Fiction*
- 1950–53 Korean War
- 1950 Gwendolyn Brooks, first African American to win Pulitzer Prize, for *Annie Allen* (1949)
- 1952 Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, represents major break with protest tradition; first African American novel to win National Book Award (1953)
- 1953 James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain*
- 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision declares segregated schools unconstitutional
- 1955 Rosa Parks arrested for refusing to go to the back of the bus; Emmett Till lynched in Mississippi
- 1956 Montgomery bus boycott; Martin Luther King Jr. emerges as civil rights leader
- 1957 Gold Coast becomes Ghana, first African state to become independent; Little Rock Nine challenged by Arkansas Governor Orville Faubus
- 1958 Robert Bone's *The Negro Novel in America*
- 1959 Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*; Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* begins long Broadway run
- 1960 Four North Carolina A & T students' first sit-in at Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro; Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) founded; death of Richard Wright

- 1961 *Freedomways* begins continuous publication
- 1962 John O. Killens's *And Then We Heard the Thunder*; James Baldwin's *Another Country*; James Meredith faces federal troops as he enrolls at University of Mississippi
- 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington, King's "I Have a Dream" speech; Civil Rights Movement in full swing; President John F. Kennedy assassinated; death of W. E. B. Du Bois
- 1964 Three civil rights workers murdered in Mississippi, kicking off Freedom Summer; Martin Luther King receives Nobel Peace Prize; Congress passes Civil Rights Act of 1964; Organization of Afro-American Unity founded by Malcolm X
- 1965–73 Vietnam War
- 1965 Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*; Selma to Montgomery March; assassination of Malcolm X; Watts riots; Black Arts Movement begins; Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, recovered and reprinted after thirty years
- 1966 Black Panther Party founded; "Black Power" slogan adopted by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Congress on Racial Equality (CORE); Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts becomes first elected black senator since Reconstruction; Margaret Walker's *Jubilee*, first neo-slave narrative
- 1967 Race riots in Newark, Detroit, Chicago; Thurgood Marshall becomes first black US Supreme Court justice; death of Langston Hughes; Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*
- 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated; Senator Robert F. Kennedy assassinated; *Black Fire*, by Larry Neal and Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), principal anthology for Black Arts Movement
- 1969 Anti-Vietnam War demonstrations/peace movement in full swing; Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*
- 1970–76 *Negro Digest* changes to *Black World*, under editor Hoyt Fuller, becomes a shaping force in the Black Arts/Black Aesthetic Movement
- 1970 Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*; Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*; Toni Cade's *The Black Woman*; African American women's literary renaissance begins; Angela Davis one of FBI's "most wanted"
- 1971 Addison Gayle's *The Black Aesthetic* presents a nationalist critical approach; Ernest J. Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, first African American slave story made into a

- mini-series; Nathan Huggins's *The Harlem Renaissance*, first critical study of the period; Attica prison revolt
- 1972 Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* defines black modernist tradition in fiction; Congress passes Equal Rights Amendment; George Kent's *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture*
- 1973 Leon Forrest's *There Is a Tree More Ancient than Eden*
- 1974 Albert Murray's *Train Whistle Guitar*
- 1975 Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* on Broadway; Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*
- 1976 Alex Haley's *Roots*, TV mini-series in 1977, attracts largest viewing audience in history
- 1977 Lawrence Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*
- 1978 James Alan McPherson awarded Pulitzer Prize for *Elbow Room* (1977)
- 1979 Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Sally Hemings*, kicks off controversy over Thomas Jefferson's mistress; Octavia Butler's *Kindred*
- 1980 Barbara Christian's *Black Women Novelists*, first major study of African American women's literary tradition
- 1981 David Bradley's *The Chaneyville Incident*
- 1982 Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*; Gloria Hull and others, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*
- 1983 Alice Walker awarded Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple* (1982); Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*
- 1984 Houston A. Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, groundbreaking study of a blues-based literary tradition; death of Chester Himes; Trudier Harris's *Exorcizing Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, first major interdisciplinary study of African American fiction
- 1985 Barbara Christian's *Black Feminist Criticism*
- 1987 Rita Dove awarded Pulitzer Prize for *Thomas and Beulah* (1986); deaths of John Oliver Killens and James Baldwin; Bernard Bell's *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*; Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Black Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*
- 1988 Toni Morrison awarded Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* (1987); Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of*

- Afro-American Literary Criticism*, represents a major contribution to literary theory and criticism
- 1989 Charles Johnson wins National Book Award for *Middle Passage*; death of Sterling Brown; Robert Stepto's *From Behind the Veil* proposes influential theory of African American narrative
- 1990 Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress*; New Black Aesthetic era begins
- 1991 Death of Frank Yerby, bestselling African American author to date
- 1992 Terri McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* is international bestseller and blockbuster movie; death of Audre Lorde
- 1993 Yusef Komunyakaa wins Pulitzer Prize for *Neon Vernacular*; Toni Morrison is first African American to win Nobel Prize for Literature
- 1994 Death of Ralph Ellison
- 1995 Nation of Islam organizes Million Man March in Washington, DC; death of Toni Cade Bambara
- 1997 Death of Leon Forrest
- 1998 Death of Margaret Walker; Claudia Tate's *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race*; death of Kwame Toure (Stokeley Carmichael), who popularized the term "Black Power"
- 1999 Ralph Ellison's *Juneteenth*, published posthumously; *Encyclopedia Africana*, largest digital encyclopedia of publications from the black world; Rosa Parks awarded Congressional Medal of Honor
- 2000 Million Women March; death of Gwendolyn Brooks

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MARYEMMA GRAHAM

Introduction

One hundred and fifty years ago the first known African American novel was published by the fugitive slave William Wells Brown. Brown was as uncertain about the audience for *Clotel*, a story about American miscegenation, as he was about the kind of text he was creating. He continued to experiment with the form and “test” his audience by publishing variations of the story for a decade. For a people prevented from reading and writing by law, it is not surprising that novel writing and novelists have since become highly valued within African American culture. The very idea of an “African American novel” then *and* now precipitates an intense debate about the form and function of any belletristic genre. Embedded in the term is a history of achievement and a cultural heritage that raises as many questions as it answers. These questions – most often about aesthetics and ideology as conflicting and compatible tendencies in the novel – have given African American authors a place of primary importance in contemporary critical discourse. As important as it is, therefore, to consider the novels written by people of African descent in America as thoroughly American, the cultural visibility and unique history of these novels demands they be read with closer scrutiny.

This kind of “segregation” has its roots in recent literary criticism as much as in the development of the genre. The earliest studies of novels by black writers, those by Sterling Brown (*The Negro in American Fiction*, 1937) and Hugh Gloster (*Negro Voices in American Fiction*, 1948), placed emphasis on the novel as historical and documentary evidence of black humanity. A second generation of critics, including Robert Bone, author of *The Negro Novel in America* (1958), evaluated the novel in terms of the prevailing formalist paradigms. Subsequent criticism, such as Addison Gayle’s *The Way of the New World: The Black Novel in America* (1975), signified a shift, an ideological conversion, giving a new dynamism to discussions of African American expressive culture. In the last twenty years, studies such as Barbara Christian’s *Black Women Novelists* (1980) and Bernard Bell’s