RIGHT ON!

An Anthology of Black Literature

Edited by
BRADFORD CHAMBERS
and
REBECCA MOON

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SIGNET, SIGNET CLASSICS, MENTOR AND PLUME BOOKS
are published *in the United States* by
The New American Library, Inc.,
1301 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10019,
in Canada by The New American Library of Canada Limited,
295 King Street East, Toronto 2, Ontario,
in the United Kingdom by The New English Library Limited,
Barnard's Inn, Holborn, London, E.C. 1, England

FIRST PRINTING, MAY, 1970

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Contents

Introduction

The literature on these pages is heady, beautiful, sad, and exciting. Nowhere in this book will the reader find the fare usually meted out to young people in anthologies: stories with happy endings, stories with facile solutions, stories with taboos for nice young middle-class people to pass by. No, the stories and poems and plays in this book deal with the realities of life as Black writers have recorded it. The works of more than forty authors are presented in these pages, from the plaintive cries of the first Black poet to be stolen from Africa to the angry, fiery voices of today's Black militants.

The book is unlike traditional anthologies that present selections in chronological sequence; we have followed that form to some extent, but it is secondary to the newer conceptual approach that presents three major themes of Black literature. These main themes delineate the Black experience in the United States: Oppression, Resistance, and the simple humanity expressed in the statement Black Is Beautiful.

Within each context we have tried to present a broad spectrum. The selections in the section Oppression follow an historical development, beginning with an example of slave oppression in Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* and concluding with the various manifestations of oppression in the modern urban ghetto depicted by Ann Petry's *In Darkness and Confusion.*

A similar pattern is followed in the Resistance section.

Charles W. Chesnutt

BIRTHDATE: 1858 DIED: November 15, 1932
BIRTHPLACE: Cleveland, Ohio

Charles Waddell Chesnutt moved from Ohio to North Carolina when he was eight years old. At sixteen he began to teach in the public schools there. At twenty-three he became a school principal.

He left the South when he was twenty-five and in Cleveland and New York worked as a legal stenographer. He passed the Ohio bar exams, yet he never practiced law, when he found he could earn more at stenography.

The Atlantic Monthly *published Chesnutt's first short story in 1877 and continued to publish him, but it was not until 1900 that the magazine revealed his race.*

The Sheriff's Children

A murder was a rare event in Branson County. Every well-informed citizen could tell the number of homicides committed in the county for fifty years back, and whether the slayer in any given instance had escaped, either by flight or acquittal, or had suffered the penalty of the law. So when it became known in Troy early one Friday morning in summer, about ten years after the war, that old Captain Walker, who had served in Mexico under Scott and had left an arm on the field of Gettysburg, had been foully murdered during the night, there was intense excitement in the village. Business was practically suspended, and the citizens gathered in little groups to discuss the murder and speculate upon the identity of the murderer. It transpired from testimony at the coroner's inquest held during the morning, that a strange mulatto had been

met going away from Troy early Friday morning by a farmer on his way to town. Other circumstances seemed to connect the stranger with the crime. The sheriff organized a posse to search for him, and early in the evening, when most of the citizens of Troy were at supper, the suspected man was brought in and lodged in the county jail.

By the following morning the news of the capture had spread to the farthest limits of the county. A much larger number of people than usual came to town that Saturday —bearded men in straw hats and blue homespun shirts, and butternut trousers of great amplitude of material and vagueness of outline; women in homespun frocks and slat-bonnets, with faces as expressionless as the dreary sandhills which gave them a meager sustenance.

The murder was almost the sole topic of conversation. A steady stream of curious observers visited the house of mourning and gazed upon the rugged face of the old veteran, now stiff and cold in death; and more than one eye dropped a tear at the remembrance of the cheery smile, and the joke—sometimes superannuated, generally feeble, but always good-natured—with which the captain had been wont to greet his acquaintances. There was a growing sentiment of anger among these stern men toward the murderer who had thus cut down their friend, and a strong feeling that ordinary justice was too slight a punishment for such a crime.

Toward noon there was an informal gathering of citizens in Dan Ayson's store.

"I hear it 'lowed that Square Kyahtah's too sick ter hol' co'te this evenin'," said one, "an' that the purlim'nary hearin' 'll haf ter go over 'tel nex' week." A look of disappointment went round the crowd.

"Hit's the durndes', meanes' murder ever committed in this caounty," said another, with moody emphasis.

"I s'pose the nigger 'lowed the Cap'n had some greenbacks," observed a third speaker.

"The Cap'n," said another, with an air of superior information, "has left two bairls of Confedrit money, which he 'spected'd be good some day er nuther."

This statement gave rise to a discussion of the speculative value of Confederate money; but in a little while the conversation returned to the murder.

"Hangin' air too good fer the murderer," said one; "he oughter be burnt, stider bein' hung."

There was an impressive pause at this point, during