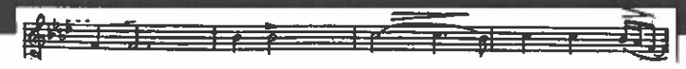
CALL AND RESPONSE



The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition

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IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER,
HAROLDINE LILLIAN CUMMINGS LIGGINS

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Preface

In response to the call of many teachers, critics, and writers of African American literature, we, the editors of *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*, are proud to present this groundbreaking textbook that joins students in centuries of conversations. It is the first comprehensive anthology of literature by African Americans presented according to the Black Aesthetic, a criteria for black art developed by Americans of African descent. As proponents of the aesthetic, we believe that African American literature is a distinct tradition, one originating in the African and African American cultural heritages and in the experience of enslavement in the United States and kept alive beyond slavery through song, sermon, and other spoken and written forms.

The uniqueness of *Call and Response* is that our aesthetic approach enables us to give equal place to the oral and written dimensions of African American literature. By broadly defining the literature, we represent in the anthology the centuries-long emergence of this aesthetic in poetry, fiction, drama, essays, speeches, letters, autobiographies, sermons, criticism, journals, and folk literature from secular songs to rap. Unlike other literature anthologies, *Call and Response* unfolds the historical development of the oral tradition simultaneously with the written literature.

In order to enhance its usefulness, clarity, and coherence, we have drawn from three motifs unique to the African American experience to give shape to the anthology. The first is the distinct African and African American antiphonal pattern of call and response. This black folk sermonic and literary technique is one of black America's major cultural art forms that fosters and reinforces a dynamic, artistic, and cultural relationship between the individual and the group. Accordingly, we use call and response in a variety of ways. Not only do we present the pattern as it is most often recognized, that is, in black sermon, song, and speech, but we also use it structurally and thematically. Structurally, we incorporate it in each section of the volume to shown the written literature answering the call of the folk culture. Thematically, we use it to feature African Americans throughout American history raising important socio-political issues and the responses to those issues either by their contemporaries or heirs in succeeding generations.

The second is the theme of the journey of African American people toward freedom, justice, and social equality. We present the culture, history, and literature of African Americans in a double structure of the literary tradition, that of the narrative of slavery through black spirituals and the poetic blues response to that experience. When the blues receives and responds to the historical call of the spirituals, the black communal voice becomes easily discernible.

The third motif overlaying the call and response pattern and black musical idioms is that of turning points. In other words, we present the oral and written literature in continual crossroads of African American experience, those crucial points throughout African American history where a decision has had to be made by Americans of African descent. We highlight this crossroads that links the African American experience from an ever-shifting past to a never-ending struggle for a more promising future.

The Organization

Arranged chronologically, *Call and Response* is divided into six historical periods that trace the journey of African American people from the arrival of the first slave ship to the North American continent to the Exodus and, then, through slavery's aftermath. Carrying through on the book's title, the first three periods, which are titled with lines from the spiritual "Go Down, Moses," trumpet the call for deliverance from slavery and oppression. They are "Go Down, Moses, Way Down in Egypt's Land" (1619–1808), "Tell Ole Pharaoh, Let My People Go" (1808–1865), and "No More Shall They in Bondage Toil" (1865–1915). As indicated in the subtitles of these chapters, these periods are constructed as a four-part slave narrative: the description of the conditions of slavery and/or oppression; the explanations of the desire for freedom; the escape to freedom; and the considerations of whether the new freedom is the ideal freedom. Shifting from the spirituals to the blues are the latter three periods: "Bound No'th Blues" (1915–1945), "Win the War Blues" (1945–1960), and "Cross Road Blues" (1960 to the present). The subtitles of these chapters take on the form of the blues idiom. Based on Langston Hughes's blues poem "Misery," they sound the responding but repetitive chords of the people's ongoing struggle for freedom and social equality, beginning with the Great Migration from the rural South to the urban North and, eventually, to the crossroads of complex social issues facing contemporary African Americans.

The Selections: An Aim of Inclusiveness

For each historical period, we have woven selections, extensive introductions, and author headnotes into a unified approach to African American literature and the culture that informs it. *Call and Response* features over 150 authors, both major and minor writers, and over 550 selections, both major and minor works. It highlights one full-length slave narrative, Frederick Douglass's *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave;* four full-length plays, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*, Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, and August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone;* one full-length novel, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye;* and three novellas, Ann Petry's "Miss Muriel," Paule Marshall's "Barbados," and Ernest Gaines's "Three Men." Rather than reprinting lengthy novels by writers, we have chosen numerous, significant, and sometimes difficult-to-find short fictional works, selections that illuminate the relationship between these literary artists and the black culture within which they were writing. Along with several excerpts from novels that extend from William Wells Brown's *Clotelle* (1853) to Terry McMillan's *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (1996), we have reprinted over thirty short stories, including Alice Dunbar-Nelson's "Sister Josepha," Rudolph Fisher's "Miss Cynthie," Richard Wright's "Long Black Song," Chester Himes's "Marihuana and a Pistol," James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues," and Dorothy West's "The Richer, the Poorer." Our volume also contains several contemporary classics such as Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," James McPherson's "Solo Song: for Doc," and Albert Murray's "Train Whistle Guitar" as well as Kristin Hunter's previously unpublished tale, "Forget-Me Not," Toni Morrison's single skillfully crafted short story "Recitatif," and Randall Kenan's fascinating piece, "The Foundations of the Earth."

In addition to providing a substantial range of period and theme within the literary tradition, the anthology underscores the delicate balance of gender. In particular, *Call and Response* redresses the long neglect of African American women authors, many of whom have been critically misunderstood or summarily dismissed from existing anthologies. Over seventy women are represented and the most recent research in African American women's studies is discussed in the appropriate introductions and headnotes. Not only does *Call and Response* explore the themes of the double standard and women's rights in the works, ranging from such literary figures as Maria W. Stewart, Frances Watkins Harper, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper to Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, and Ntozake Shange, but it also reveals the secondary positions to which black women writers had been relegated in both the Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts Movements. Of special interest are the selections and discussions on works that represent different brands of feminism embraced by black female intellectuals: black feminism, womanism, and Africana womanism. They include essays such as Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," bell hooks's "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," and Clenora Hudson-Weems's "Africana Womanism: An Historical, Global Perspective for Women of African Descent." Appealing to both the beginning and the advanced student, the volume can be used in a variety of courses, whether focused on gender, genre, historical period, or theme.

The Introductions and Headnotes: Extended Scholarship

To place the generous selections within a historical and sociopolitical context, we have written thorough introductions to each section, information that appears with a refined clarity so appropriate for newcomers to the scope and breadth of African American literature. In each introduction we inquire into contested ideas and theories that will challenge even professionals in the field. The author headnotes contain a critical analysis and selected bibliography of each author's works. We trace each author's career and address the question of that writer's place in African American and American history.

We begin the volume with a chapter on the transplantation of African culture to North America and its transformation to African American orature. We give a broad survey of African cultural survivals in Colonial slave folk culture and an overview of the re-Africanization of Christianity. We provide extensive research on the unmistakably African origins of African American music and folklore such as African praise songs and oral epic narratives.

The forms of these and other black folk idioms in the anthology are explained in headnotes that were prepared by editor Patricia Liggins Hill. She, along with editors Bernard Bell and Trudier Harris, also wrote the folk culture sections in the introductions. For the research on the oral tradition, we, the editors, are greatly indebted to Hildred Roach's *Black American Music: Past and Present* (1992), Eileen Southern's *The Music of Black Americans* (1971; 1983, second edition) and the other authoritative sources that follow: Mary F. Berry and John Blassingame's *Long Black Memory: The Black Experience in America* (1982); J. Mason Brewer's *American Negro Folklore* (1968); Dena Epstein's *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (1977); LeRoi Jones's (Amiri Baraka's) *Blues People* (1963); John Lovell, Jr.'s *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame* (1972); J. H. Kwabena Nketia's *The Music of Africa* (1974); John W. Roberts's *From Trickster to Badman* (1989); Tricia Rose's *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994); and Ben Sidran's *Black Talk* (1971).

While *Call and Response* traces the oral literature from Africa to present-day black America, it simultaneously shows the written literature that corresponds and responds to the crossroads reflected in the oral heritage. In the introduction to Part I, editor Sondra O'Neale unveils the historical crossroad of eighteenth-century black tradition, the constant tension between overt and subtle protest against the slave condition. As evidenced in the worksongs, spirituals, and folktales of the day and in the works of such writers as Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley, the only safe form of resistance in both the written and oral literature has always been a veiled form. As O'Neale points out, the successful attempts at overt protest came after the founding of the Black Church in the northern colonies, when African American authors such as Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and Prince Hall were free to write to and address black audiences. These forms of protest lead to the historical crossroads within the militant black abolitionist movement of the early nineteenth century covered by Part II editor Patricia Liggins Hill, namely, whether leaders of the movement should strive for the black community's emigration from the United States or integration into the mainstream of American society. Liggins Hill also delves into the origins of another crossroad that continues to the present day, the crossroad of black rights versus women's rights as seen in the literary exchanges between Frederick Douglass, Frances Watkins Harper, and Sojourner Truth. As this historical crossroad runs its course throughout the late nineteenth century, Part III editor Trudier Harris presents the decade of the 1890s as both the era of Booker T. Washington and that of the black woman. In the historical introduction Harris features the controversy between the racial accomodationist Booker T. Washington and the black radical W.E.B. Du Bois as to the solution to the black dilemma of overcoming the legacies of slavery and racism.

The latter three periods also highlight the historical crossroad between black colonization and social integration, from Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa Movement of the 1920s to the integrationist philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the separatist ideology of Malcolm X of the 1960s. These chapters also focus on the literary crossroad, namely, whether black art should be art for art's sake or art for people's sake. Part IV editors R. Baxter Miller and Patricia Liggins Hill feature the debate during the Harlem Renaissance between Alain Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois on the theory of black art. The debate as to the nature of black art continues on in Part V as editors Bernard Bell, Patricia Liggins Hill, and Horace Porter discuss the debate in the 1950 issue of *Phylon* among several black critics, including Hugh M. Gloster and Nick Aaron Ford. With the collaborative efforts of Liggins Hill and O'Neale, Part VI editor William J. Harris presents, in the final and largest section of the anthology, the critical debate of the contemporary period between black aesthetician Joyce Ann Joyce and black post-structuralists Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Houston Baker, Jr., on the Black Aesthetic versus Black Post-structuralism.

ANCILLARIES

A comprehensive instructor's manual and an audio compact disc containing recorded versions of some of the spoken and musical selections accompany the anthology. Prepared with the assistance and expertise of our colleague Johnanna Grimes of Tennessee State University, the *Instructor's Manual* weaves successful practices for generating innovative classroom discussion and ideas for linking authors and selections. Paralleling the content of *Call and Response*, the manual also includes recommendations for effectively introducing the compact disc into both lecture formats and class discussions. The audio disc, produced by our Coppin State College colleague Robert H. Cataliotti, consists of selections that reflect the development of the oral tradition. Beginning with an African griot's exciting version of the African oral epic *Sunjata* (also spelled *Sundiata* or *Sunyetta*), the disc moves forward through decade and century featuring recordings not only of black folklore, music, and speeches, but also of poets Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Margaret Walker, Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, and Nikki Giovanni reading their verse.

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The Editors

CALL AND RESPONSE

RESPONSE: THE WRITTEN TRADITION

VOICES OF THE FOLK TRADITION

CHARLES W. CHESNUTT
(1858–1932)

Charles Waddell Chesnutt, referred to as the "pioneer of the color line" because of his thematic focus on interracial relationships, was one of the major African American writers to win national prominence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In contrast to his predecessors, he was able to secure the support of large publishing outlets. His development of assimilationist themes in his works and his concern with the African American folk tradition gave his work a flavor that tied together his roots in North Carolina with his cosmopolitan life in Cleveland, Ohio. His depictions of how black people fared during Reconstruction and shortly thereafter won him audiences from the budding African American literary community as well as from the established white literati. Chesnutt achieved success initially through publishing short stories in the *Atlantic Monthly;* he won the support of editors and writers such as Walter Hines Page and George W. Cable, as well as the editors at Houghton Mifflin.

Chesnutt was born on June 20, 1858, in Cleveland, Ohio, to Andrew Jackson and Anne Maria Sampson Chesnutt, free blacks who had migrated from Fayetteville, North Carolina. Andrew Chesnutt served as a teamster in the Union Army, and Anne Maria had secretly taught slaves in North Carolina, so the young Charles was heir to a tradition of racial and national commitment. Andrew moved his family back to Fayetteville in 1866, where Charles helped his father in their grocery business and attended the local normal school. By the time his mother died in 1871 and he had to help support the family, he had acquired enough education to begin teaching school. One job took him to Spartanburg, South Carolina, and another to Charlotte, North Carolina. Between teaching duties, Chesnutt continued his education by studying American history, algebra, Latin and other languages, music, and literature. As early as 1874, he began to keep a journal that would play a significant role in his observation of race relations as well as in his articulation of his role as a writer.

Returning to teach in Fayetteville in 1877, Chesnutt married a fellow teacher, Susan Perry, in 1878. He added stenography to his studies as a way of combatting the stifling effect of small-town America. Although he became principal in 1880 of the normal school he had attended, his education and color (he was a "white" black man) placed him between the races, and he resigned in 1883 to try his hand at legal stenography in the North. He was also becoming increasingly convinced that he should become a writer. Observing Judge Albion Tourgée's success in writing about black people in North Carolina, Chesnutt questioned in his journal why he could not do the same. He determined that, if he wrote, he would write for "a high, holy purpose." His writing would be goal oriented in terms of preparing the way for black people to get "recognition and equality."

The summer of 1883 found Chesnutt alone in New York working as a stenographer and reporter for the New York *Mail and Express.* Within six months, however, he had decided to move to Cleveland, where he took his family, daughters Ethel and Helen Maria ("Nellie") and son Edwin ("Ned") in addition to his wife, in 1884; a third daughter, Dorothy, was born in Cleveland. That city not only would provide refuge for Chesnutt but also would appear in various of his short works, such as "Baxter's Procrustes" and "The Wife of His Youth."

As early as 1872, Chesnutt had published a short story in a local newspaper in Fayetteville. In 1885, he published "Uncle Peter's House," another short story, with the S.S. McClure newspaper syndicate. He also developed his first long-standing literary friendship during this period; he and George W. Cable exchanged letters and essays. In one radical essay, Chesnutt urged an end to all forms of segregation in the South. Cable tried unsuccessfully to get Chesnutt's "Rena Walden" published in *Century Magazine.* That story, and the many versions of it Chesnutt worked on over the years, formed the core of what became *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900, originally titled "Rena Walden"), a novel depicting the tragic consequences of a young black woman passing for white. Although Chesnutt passed the Ohio bar in 1887 and joined a Cleveland law firm, he nonetheless continued his lucrative business as a court reporter as well as his profession as a writer.

"The Goophered Grapevine," the first story in *The Conjure Woman,* appeared in the August 1887 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly,* after which Walter Hines Page of Houghton Mifflin approached Chesnutt about reading all the short fiction he had written. That contact resulted in the selection and publication of the seven stories in *The Conjure Woman,* which appeared in 1899. Consciously drawing on the tradition of Uncle Remus telling stories to a little white boy, which had been popularized by Joel Chandler Harris in the 1880s, Chesnutt created Uncle Julius, a kindly trickster who tells tales in dialect for his own benefit and that of a northern white couple who have relocated to the South. The volume demonstrates the peculiar position of a black writer trying to make inroads into a white reading audience; while Chesnutt may have wanted to be critical of slavery and the conditions under which blacks lived during Reconstruction, he could only do so by veiling his messages in tales wrapped in fantasy and superstition in order not to offend his audience. Chesnutt also published a biography of Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass,* in 1899 (Boston: Small, Maynard).

In 1900, Houghton Mifflin published Chesnutt's *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line.* (The title story was originally published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1898.) Explorations into miscegenation and other cross-racial sexual encounters, the nine stories weigh the value of human relationships and attachments against the dictates of communities that would keep the races separate. They also explore the intraracial color bar, where black people adopt the value system and prejudices based on color as practiced by the larger society. In "The Wife of His Youth," for example, the leader of Groveland's (Cleveland's) Blue Veins must make the wrenching choice of marrying a very light-skinned black woman or accepting the very dark-skinned "wife of his youth," to whom he had been married during slavery and from whom he had run away more than twenty-five years before. In another instance, a white sheriff who has fathered a black son must make a decision to acknowledge that son when he is jailed or continue to deny kinship to him.

Color, Chesnutt asserts, frequently takes priority over morality and conscience, and human beings distort innate affection in favor of societally prescribed roles that can negate their very essence as beings with altruistic feelings. The psychological traumas of people of mixed blood, combined with the racial hatred and mob violence sometimes directed toward them, did not make for the romantic times that proponents of the Plantation Tradition advocated. Reviewers such as William Dean Howells and Hamilton Wright Mabie applauded Chesnutt's craft, but others were less enthusiastic about his focus on such disturbing subjects.

Chesnutt's efforts not to offend, therefore, did not last long. When he published *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), a fictionalized account of the Wilmington, North Carolina, massacre of black people who tried to vote in the 1898 election, his critics began to see some bitterness in his work. Sales were disappointing enough (less than five thousand copies sold instead of the projected twenty to thirty thousand) for Chesnutt to reopen in 1902 the court-reporting business he had closed in 1899 to pursue writing full-time. When he published *The Colonel's Dream* (1905), a hard-hitting account of the brutal responses to a kind-hearted Southern white man's effort to transform his prejudiced community, the critical response was so negative that Chesnutt gave up trying to make his living from publishing literary works on race problems in the South. He did not stop writing, however. He had completed two novels, *The Rainbow Chasers* and *Evelyn's Husband,* before 1905 (both focusing on white characters) that did not win publication. After them, he wrote *Mrs. Darcy's Daughter; Paul Marchand, F.M.C.; The Quarry;* and two additional novels; none he submitted for review was judged to be publishable. His revisions of them continued into the 1920s. Uneasy with the direction being taken by some of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance, Chesnutt joined W.E.B. Du Bois and William Stanley Braithwaite in advocating and producing a counterliterature; his efforts were not successful.

As politically active personally as he was in his literary works, Chesnutt publicly espoused a number of causes in the two decades following 1905. He joined Booker T. Washington's Committee of Twelve, a group of speechwriters and pamphleteers who composed essays that depicted blacks sympathetically to influence white public opinion. He also supported the efforts of the Niagara Movement, which would lead to the founding of the NAACP. Chesnutt joined other blacks in protesting the showing of D.W. Griffiths's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). He completed a series of articles on black and white intermarriage as a solution to race problems.

A few recognitions and rewards came to Chesnutt in the 1920s. In 1921, black filmmaker Oscar Micheaux bought the rights to *The House Behind the Cedars,* made the movie, and showed it to black audiences. The Chicago *Defender* serialized *The House Behind the Cedars.* The NAACP presented Chesnutt with its Spingarn Medal in 1928 for his pioneering work as a literary artist, and, in 1930, Houghton Mifflin reprinted *The Conjure Woman* in a handsome edition; it was the first time in many years that one of Chesnutt's works was back in print.

Color provided Chesnutt with the unique perspective of being caught between cultures and races. His observations on passing, miscegenation, and assimilation enabled him to create a body of works reflective of the peculiar state of American race relations at the turn of the century. Although his works were read in his lifetime, Chesnutt's true literary value has been uncovered in more recent years when quieter political times have allowed readers to appreciate the difficulty as well as the artistry of his achievements.

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Chesnutt's short stories have been collected by Sylvia Lyons Render in a volume titled *The Short Fiction of Charles W. Chesnutt* (1980).

The earliest biography of Chesnutt is by his daughter, Helen M. Chesnutt, titled *Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line* (1952). Another biography, by Frances Richardson Keller, is *An American Crusade: The Life of Charles Waddell Chesnutt* (1978). A notable biographical and critical study is William L. Andrews's *The Literary Career of Charles Waddell Chesnutt* (1980).

Book-length critical studies are few: J. Noel Heermance, *Charles W. Chesnutt: America's First Great Black Novelist* (1974); Sylvia Lyons Render, *Charles W. Chesnutt* (1980).

The Goophered Grapevine

Some years ago my wife was in poor health, and our family doctor, in whose skill and honesty I had implicit confidence, advised a change of climate. I shared, from an unprofessional standpoint, his opinion that the raw winds, the chill rains, and the violent changes of temperature that characterized the winters in the region of the Great Lakes tended to aggravate my wife's difficulty, and would undoubtedly shorten her life if she remained exposed to them. The doctor's advice was that we seek, not a temporary place of sojourn, but a permanent residence, in a warmer and more equable climate. I was engaged at the time in grape-culture in northern Ohio, and, as I liked the business and had given it much study, I decided to look for some other locality suitable for carrying it on. I thought of sunny France, of sleepy Spain, of Southern California, but there were objections to them all. It occurred to me that I might find what I wanted in some one of our own Southern States. It was a sufficient time after the war for conditions in the South to have become somewhat settled; and I was enough of a pioneer to start a new industry, if I could not find a place where grape-culture had been tried. I wrote to a cousin who had gone into the turpentine business in central North Carolina. He assured me, in response to my inquiries, that no better place could be found in the South than the State and neighborhood where he lived; the climate was perfect for health, and, in conjunction with the soil, ideal for grape-culture; labor was cheap, and land could be bought for a mere song. He gave us a cordial invitation to come and visit him while we looked into the matter. We accepted the invitation, and after several days of leisurely travel, the last hundred miles of which were up a river on a sidewheel steamer, we reached our destination, a quaint old town, which I shall call Patesville, because, for one reason, that is not its name. There was a red brick market-house in the public square, with a tall tower, which held a four-faced clock that struck the hours, and from which there pealed out a curfew at nine o'clock. There were two or three hotels, a courthouse, a jail, stores, offices, and all the appurtenances of a county seat and a commercial emporium; for while Patesville numbered only four or five thousand inhabitants, of all shades of complexion, it was one of the principal towns in North Carolina, and had a considerable trade in cotton and naval stores. This business activity was not immediately apparent to my unaccustomed eyes. Indeed, when I first saw the town, there brooded over it a calm that seemed almost sabbatic in its restfulness, though I learned later on that underneath its somnolent exterior the deeper currents of life—love and hatred, joy and despair, ambition and avarice, faith and