

THE VERNACULAR TRADITION
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THE LITERATURE OF SLAVERY AND FREEDOM
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LITERATURE OF THE RECONSTRUCTION TO THE NEW NEGRO RENAISSANCE
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REALISM, NATURALISM, MODERNISM
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The Norton Anthology of African American Literature

SECOND EDITION

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The Norton Anthology of African American Literature

SECOND EDITION

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Remembering Richard Wright	1599	I Am a Black Woman	1851
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the mother	1625		
a song in the front yard •	1626		

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3 [Picture of the Writer]	1891	Soul on Ice	2007
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. (1929–1968)	1895	The Primeval Mitosis	2007
Letter from Birmingham Jail	1896	A. B. SPELLMAN (b. 1935)	2015
ETHERIDGE KNIGHT (1931–1985)	1908	Did John's Music Kill Him?	2015
The Idea of Ancestry	1908	JUNE JORDAN (1936–2002)	2016
Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the		In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr.	2017
Criminal Insane	1909	Poem about My Rights	2019
For Black Poets Who Think of Suicide	1910	Poem for Guatemala	2021
ADDISON GAYLE JR. (1932–1991)	1911	Intifada	2023
The Black Aesthetic	1912	From Civil Wars: Observations from the Front Lines of	
Introduction	1912	America	2025
AUDRE LORDE (1934–1992)	1919	From Soldier: A Poet's Childhood	2027
Equinox	1920	LUCILLE CLIFTON (b. 1936)	2031
Coal	1922	the lost baby poem	2032
Now That I Am Forever with Child	1922	malcolm	2033
A Litany for Survival	1923	homage to my hips	2033
Poetry Is Not a Luxury	1924	wishes for sons	2033
Zami: A New Spelling of My Name	1926	move	2034
From 3	1926	JAYNE CORTEZ (b. 1936)	2035
From 11	1928	How Long Has Trane Been Gone •	2036
From 31	1932	LARRY NEAL (1937–1981)	2038
Epilogue	1936	The Black Arts Movement	2039
AMIRI BARAKA (b. 1934)	1937	ISHMAEL REED (b. 1938)	2051
Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note	1939	I am a cowboy in the boat of Ra	2052
In Memory of Radio	1939	Railroad Bill, a Conjure Man	2053
A Poem for Black Hearts	1940	Dualism	2058
I don't love you	1941	Chattanooga	2058
Three Movements and a Coda	1941	Neo-HooDoo Manifesto	2062
SOS	1942	From Mumbo Jumbo	2066
Black Art	1943	MICHAEL S. HARPER (b. 1938)	2070
The Invention of Comics	1944	Dear John, Dear Coltrane •	2071
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Summer Words of a Sistuh Addict •	1966	Black Art: Mute Matter Given Force and Function	2086
A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women	1966		
From Part Three	1966		
ED BULLINS (b. 1935)	1968		
Goin'a Buffalo: A Tragifantasy	1969		

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Preface to the Second Edition

In the fall of 1986, eleven scholars gathered on the campus of Cornell University to discuss the need for a *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* and to consider how best to execute the mammoth task of editing such a historic anthology, should we collectively decide to embark upon it. These scholars, chosen for their leadership in the field, represented a wide array of methodological approaches to the study of literature; each had a particular expertise in at least one historical period in the African American literary tradition. We were accompanied in our deliberations by M. H. Abrams, the “father” of Norton Anthologies, and John Benedict, vice president and editor at Norton, both of whom had championed our project during its two-year gestation period from proposal to approval.

Two things struck us all, we think it fair to say, about our discussions. First was a certain sense of history-in-the-making, in which we were participating by the act of editing this anthology. While anthologies of African American literature had been published at least since 1845, ours would be the first Norton Anthology, and Norton—along with just a few other publishers—had become synonymous to our generation with canon formation. Because of its scope and size, a Norton Anthology could serve as “a course in a book,” as John Benedict was fond of saying. So, in spite of the existence of dozens of anthologies of black literature—a tradition of which we were keenly aware since we had closely studied the tables of contents and editorial introductions of each of these and photocopied and bound them for each of our prospective editors—none was ample enough to include between two covers the range of the texts necessary to satisfy the requirements of an entire survey course. To meet this need was our goal.

This was crucial if we were going to make the canon of African American literature as readily accessible to teachers and students as were, say, the canons of American or English literature. Too often, we had heard colleagues complain that they *would* teach African American literature “if only the texts were available” in a form affordable to their students, meaning in a one- or two-volume anthology, rather than in a half dozen or more individual volumes. Were we successful in our endeavor, we believed, then not only could teachers teach African American literature, but they would do so eagerly, and new courses would be created in four- and two-year institutions and at the high school level. A well-edited, affordable anthology democratizes access. And broader access was essential for the permanent institutionalization of the black literary tradition within departments of English, American Studies, and African American Studies.

The second surprise of our Ithaca meeting was how “un-theoretical” the process of editing would be. Many of us were deeply engaged in the passionate theoretical debates that would define “the canon wars,” as they came to be called. It soon became apparent to us that editing an anthology is not