

CAVALCADE

Negro American Writing from 1760 to the Present

edited by

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SAUNDERS REDDING

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For
Arthur Paul and Audrey Paulette
Conway and Lewis

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PREFACE

The purpose of this anthology is to provide a representative selection of as much as possible of the best prose and poetry written by Negro Americans since 1760. While it has been our primary aim to make these choices on the basis of literary merit, we have also tried to cover as many areas of Negro life in America as was consistent with our first objective. We believe that this collection gives a fairly comprehensive picture of Negro experience in America for the past two hundred years.

In making our selections, we have tried within reason to avoid duplicating the material in other anthologies. To avoid *all* of the selections in other works would be unwise; to do so would leave out of our book some of the best work done by Negro writers in America. Since there is a "classic" Negro literature just as there is a classic canon of English or French or any other established literature, we inevitably have some duplications. But we also have included many works not found in other collections.

Whenever feasible, we have given whole works rather than excerpts. A few articles, however, have been far too long to include in their entirety in an anthology of this size, and we have used parts of them—parts which we believe can stand alone. We have done the same for plays, and naturally we have used chapters from novels and autobiographies. In every case we have seen to it that the selection can stand alone and is fairly representative of the author's general matter and manner. Whenever we left out short sections of a work, we indicated this omission with the conventional ellipses; for longer omissions, we used asterisks. When novels or autobiographies had chapter titles, we used them. When there were no titles, we supplied our own, noting so in a footnote.

This anthology is designed for use as a text in Negro American literature courses or as a supplementary text in American literature courses. The introductions to the five sections provide, we believe, a background sufficient to give meaning and perspective to the offerings in each section. The bibliographical data at the end of the biographical sketches and in the Selective Bibliography should be helpful to student and teacher alike, serving, we hope, as springboards for additional study.

In preparing this volume, we have examined and consulted practically all of the anthologies, collections, and critical works on Negro

literature extant; and we are indebted in some measure to all of them. We wish to acknowledge a special indebtedness to the following works: *The Negro Author* by Vernon Loggins; *Early Negro American Writers* by Benjamin Brawley; *Negro Poetry and Drama* and *The Negro in American Fiction* by Sterling A. Brown.

We wish to thank the staff of the Moorland Room, Founders Library, Howard University, under the direction of Mrs. Dorothy A. Porter; and the staff of Mrs. Ethel P. Page's office. We thank both for many different kinds of help, always efficiently and graciously given. We also wish to thank Miss Jennifer Jordan of Howard University for research help on the biographical data for this work.

Arthur P. Davis
Saunders Redding

CONTENTS

Preface / vii
General Introduction / xviii

1 / PIONEER WRITERS: 1760-1830

INTRODUCTION / 3
PHILLIS WHEATLEY / 8
<i>To the University of Cambridge in New-England</i> / 10
<i>On Being Brought from Africa to America</i> / 11
<i>On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield. 1770</i> / 11
<i>An Hymn to the Morning</i> / 12
<i>An Hymn to the Evening</i> / 13
<i>On Imagination</i> / 13
<i>To His Excellency General Washington</i> / 15
GUSTAVUS VASSA / 17
<i>Early Life in Africa</i> / 18
<i>Slave Ship</i> / 27
GEORGE MOSES HORTON / 33
<i>An Acrostic for Julia Shepard</i> / 35
<i>The Creditor to His Proud Debtor</i> / 35
<i>George Moses Horton, Myself</i> / 36
<i>On Liberty and Slavery</i> / 37
<i>To Eliza</i> / 38
<i>Jefferson in a Tight Place</i> / 39
<i>Like Brothers We Meet</i> / 40
<i>Letter to Mr. Horace Greeley</i> / 40
DAVID WALKER / 42
<i>Our Wretchedness in Consequence of Ignorance</i> / 43
<i>Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Preachers of the Religion of Jesus Christ</i> / 46

2 / FREEDOM FIGHTERS: 1830-1865

INTRODUCTION / 53
WILLIAM WELLS BROWN / 57
<i>The Slave's Social Circle</i> / 58
<i>The Negro Sale</i> / 60
<i>Stud Negro</i> / 63
MARTIN R. DELANY / 65
<i>Henry at Large</i> / 66

Southern Fun / 69
Dat Ol' Time Religion / 70
 SOJOURNER TRUTH / 78
"And Arn't I a Woman?" / 79
 FREDERICK DOUGLASS / 82
My First Acquaintance with Abolitionists / 83
The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro / 87
 FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS (HARPER) / 101
The Slave Auction / 101
The Dying Bondman / 102
Bury Me in a Free Land / 103
A Double Standard / 104
Learning to Read / 106
 CHARLOTTE L. FORTEN / 108
from The Journal / 109

3 / ACCOMMODATION AND PROTEST: 1865-1910

INTRODUCTION / 121
 WILLIAM STILL / 125
William and Ellen Craft / 126
Henry Box Brown / 128
 ELIZABETH KECKLEY / 132
The Secret History of Mrs. Lincoln's Wardrobe in New York / 132
 GEORGE WASHINGTON WILLIAMS / 142
Heroism: Black and White / 143
 BOOKER TALIAFERRO WASHINGTON / 152
The Struggle for an Education / 153
An Address Delivered at the Opening of the Cotton States' Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, September, 1895 / 158
Address Delivered at the Harvard Alumni Dinner in 1896 / 161
 SUTTON ELBERT GRIGGS / 163
The Blaze / 164
 CHARLES WADDELL CHESNUTT / 168
The Goophered Grapevine / 169
The Wife of His Youth / 179
 JAMES DAVID CORROTHERS / 189
At the Closed Gate of Justice / 189
Paul Laurence Dunbar / 190
The Negro Singer / 190
 KELLY MILLER / 192
An Open Letter to Thomas Dixon, Jr. / 192
Woodrow Wilson and the Negro / 202
 PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR / 205
An Ante-Bellum Sermon / 206
Ode to Ethiopia / 208

When de Co'n Pone's Hot / 210
Signs of the Times / 211
We Wear the Mask / 212
Chrismus on the Plantation / 212
Anner 'Lizer's Stumblin' Block / 213
 WILLIAM STANLEY BEAUMONT BRAITHWAITE / 224
Del Cascar / 225
Turn Me to My Yellow Leaves / 225
Sic Vita / 225
Scintilla / 226
The Watchers / 226
Quiet Has a Hidden Sound / 227

4 / THE NEW NEGRO RENAISSANCE AND BEYOND: 1910-1954

INTRODUCTION / 229
 WILLIAM EDWARD BURGHARDT DU BOIS / 236
A New England Boy and Reconstruction / 237
from An Indicted Criminal / 246
 JAMES WELDON JOHNSON / 254
The Prodigal Son / 254
New York's Black Bohemia / 258
Early Negro Entertainers / 260
Marcus Garvey / 264
 ANNE SPENCER / 269
Before the Feast of Shushan / 269
Letter to My Sister / 270
At the Carnival / 271
Lines to a Nasturtium / 272
 ALAIN LEROY LOCKE / 274
The New Negro / 274
 JEAN TOOMER / 285
Song of the Son / 285
Cotton Song / 286
Esther / 287
 CLAUDE MCKAY / 292
Harlem Shadows / 293
Spring in New Hampshire / 293
If We Must Die / 294
The White House / 294
America / 294
Myrtle Avenue / 295
 LANGSTON HUGHES / 302
Negro Dancers / 303
The Cat and the Saxophone / 303

Cross / 304
 Ruby Brown / 304
 Theme for English B / 305
 Mother to Son / 306
 The Negro Speaks of Rivers / 307
 Bound No'th Blues / 308
 Puzzled / 308
 Motto / 309
 Low to High / 309
 High to Low / 310
Who's Passing for Who? / 311
 Picture for Her Dresser / 314
 Bombs in Barcelona / 318
 COUNTÉE CULLEN / 323
 Yet Do I Marvel / 324
 Incident / 324
 Pagan Prayer / 325
 Tribute / 326
 For a Lady I Know / 326
 Heritage / 326
 To John Keats, Poet. At Springtime / 329
 To Certain Critics / 331
 ARNA BONTEMPS / 332
 A Black Man Talks of Reaping / 332
 Miracles / 333
 Nocturne at Bethesda / 333
 Southern Mansion / 335
 The Return / 335
 RUDOLPH FISHER / 337
 High Yaller / 337
 JESSIE R. FAUSET / 354
 Class / 354
 MAY MILLER / 359
 Gift from Kenya / 359
 Procession / 360
 Tally / 361
 MELVIN B. TOLSON / 364
 from Psi / 364
 WARING CUNNEY / 374
 Old Workman / 374
 Colored / 374
 Beale Street / 375
 Girl from Oklahoma / 376
 Women and Kitchens / 376
 No Images / 377

WILLIAM ATTAWAY / 378
 North to Hell / 378
 ROBERT E. HAYDEN / 385
 The Diver / 385
 Homage to the Empress of the Blues / 387
 Middle Passage / 388
 Frederick Douglass / 392
 O Daedalus, Fly Away Home / 393
 OWEN DODSON / 394
 Miss Packard and Miss Giles / 394
 Tell Rachel, He Whispered / 395
 Train Ride / 396
 STERLING A. BROWN / 400
 Odyssey of Big Boy / 400
 Old Lem / 402
 Sister Lou / 404
 Memphis Blues / 405
 Slim in Atlanta / 407
 Remembering Nat Turner / 408
 The New Negro in Literature (1925-1955) / 410 ✓
 ARTHUR P. DAVIS / 428
 Growing Up in the New Negro Renaissance / 428 ✓
 SAUNDERS REDDING / 438
 The American Negro Writer and His Roots / 438
 Robert Sengstacke Abbott of the Chicago Defender / 444
 ZORA NEALE HURSTON / 454
 Folk Tales / 454
 RICHARD WRIGHT / 459
 The Wages of Humility / 460
 The Man Who Was Almost a Man / 470
 CHESTER B. HIMES / 481
 Rape! / 481
 WILLIAM DEMBY / 489
 The Nightriders / 489
 ANN PETRY / 500
 Dead End Street / 500
 GWENDOLYN BROOKS / 515
 of De Witt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery / 516
 The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith / 516
 the rites for Cousin Vit / 520
 We Real Cool / 521
 The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock / 521
 Malcolm X / 523
 The Wall / 524
 intermission-(deep summer) / 525

MARGARET A. WALKER / 527

For My People / 527

Poppa Chicken / 529

We Have Been Believers / 530

RALPH ELLISON / 532

At the Golden Day / 533

Hidden Name and Complex Fate / 550

5 / INTEGRATION VERSUS BLACK NATIONALISM:

1954 TO THE PRESENT

INTRODUCTION / 567

JAMES BALDWIN / 571

The Threshing-Floor / 572

*Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the
Emancipation* / 583

ULYSSES LEE / 587

The Draft and the Negro / 587

PAULE MARSHALL / 598

Brooklyn / 598

SAMUEL W. ALLEN (PAUL VESEY) / 615

A Moment, Please / 615

American Gothic / 616

Africa to Me / 617

Negritude and Its Relevance to the American Negro Writer / 617

OSSIE DAVIS / 627

Purlie Victorious (Act I, scene i) / 627

LEROI JONES / 646

Crow Jane In High Society / 647

The invention of comics / 647

Black Dada Nihilismus / 648

The Myth of a Negro Literature / 651

ED BULLINS / 658

Clara's Ole Man / 658

JOHN A. WILLIAMS / 676

Project: King Alfred / 677

WILLIAM MELVIN KELLEY / 686

The Only Man on Liberty Street / 686

Harlem Quest / 693

ERNEST J. GAINES / 704

Just Like a Tree / 704

CLAUDE BROWN / 724

Drugs and Harlem / 724

MALCOLM X / 739

Saved / 740

FAITH BERRY / 758

Black to Black: A Letter to Africa / 758

NEW POETS / 762

LAWRENCE BENFORD / 763

The Beginning of a Long Poem on Why I Burned the City / 763

MARGARET DANNER / 764

The Elevator Man Adheres to Form / 764

MARI EVANS / 765

Vive Noir! / 765

WILLIAM J. HARRIS / 767

Samantha Is My Negro Cat / 767

LANCE JEFFERS / 768

On Listening to the Spirituals / 769

ALICIA LOY JOHNSON / 769

On My Blk/ness / 769

PERCY EDWARD JOHNSTON / 770

to paul robeson, opus no. 3 / 771

NAOMI LONG MADGETT / 772

For a Child / 772

OLIVER PITCHER / 773

Harlem: Sidewalk Icons / 773

DUDLEY RANDALL / 774

Booker T. and W. E. B. / 774

JON WOODSON / 775

Saturday / 775

DON L. LEE / 777

The Self-Hatred of Don L. Lee / 777

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. / 779

The World House / 779

LARRY NEAL / 797

The Black Arts Movement / 797

SONIA SANCHEZ / 811

The Bronx Is Next / 811

NATHAN A. SCOTT, JR. / 820

*Judgment Marked by a Cellar: The American Negro Writer and
the Dialectic of Despair* / 821

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER / 843

On Becoming / 843

HAROLD CRUSE / 853

*Postscript on Black Power—The Dialogue Between Shadow
and Substance* / 853

Selective Bibliography / 873

Index of Authors and Titles / 899

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

There have been several collections of Negro American writing in recent years, but an anthology of writings by any national, cultural, time-contained, or ethnic group should serve a pedagogical function for students. None of the recent collections of Negro American writing quite does. None shows the evolution of this writing as literary art. None provides the historical context that makes meaningful the criticism of this writing as the expression of the American Negro's special experience and as a tool of social and cultural diagnosis. That is the purpose of this anthology. It comprehends the entire two hundred years of Negro American literature.

It has been our purpose to give not only a comprehensive account of the development of Negro American literature but, as far as humanly possible, a balanced and impartial account as well. No author has been left out because we disagree with his critical attitude, or his politics, or his stand on certain issues. By the same token, no author has been included because he happens to think as we do. Our selections, for example, represent practically every major Negro American critic—Alain Locke, Sterling Brown, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Nathan Scott, Larry Neal, Harold Cruse, and LeRoi Jones. *Our* criticism of Negro writing is found in the headnotes and the several introductions.

The term "Negro writing" requires an explanation that goes beyond the obvious one of a body of writing by American blacks. Some Negro writers like William Stanley Braithwaite, Anne Spencer, and Frank Yerby, "write like whites." The entire stock of their referents is white, Anglo-Saxon American derived. Most black American writers, however, create out of a dual consciousness: Negro and American. They are twin-rooted, and while one root is nourished by the myths, customs, culture, and values traditional in the Western world, the other feeds hungrily on the experiential reality of blackness. These writers have a special vision. They are persuaded to a special mission. In their work they combine the sermon and the liturgy, the reality and the dream, the *is* and the *ought to be*. Their writing is intended to appeal as much to the cognitive as to the affective side of man's being.

Though *Cavalcade* is comprehensive, the basis on which works were chosen for inclusion was primarily literary merit. This excluded the work of some writers who have a certain historical importance, and who, therefore, are subjects of comment in the introductions. When

other than an author's best is included, it is because it represents a critical phase of his development.

For the purposes of a historical survey, it seemed sensible to divide the history of Negro American writing into five periods. They are designated (and dated): Pioneer Writers (1760-1830); Freedom Fighters (1830-1865); Accommodation and Protest (1865-1910); The New Negro Renaissance and Beyond (1910-1954); Integration versus Black Nationalism (1954 to the present). Each period is prefaced with a critical introduction, and there is a bio-bibliographical headnote for each author.

The editors have exercised discretion in matters of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in those works which were carelessly printed and edited in the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth. After that time, the editors have generally followed the texts as published.

Though the editors designed *Cavalcade* primarily as a textbook, they hope it is something more. They hope it is a book that the general public may read with pleasure and profit.

A. P. D.
S. R.

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from 1760 to the Present**