

African american studies

[History](#), [African American](#)



American Literature has come a long way. It dates back as far as the pre-colonization-period America which is contrary to the current belief of almost everyone that English has always been the language in America. Although it was noted that " some fifty years after the political establishment of the United States, the concept of an American literature barely existed" (Delbanco), American literature did exist and is still existing. Literature as a communication involving some degree of emotional or aesthetic response is both an independent discipline and one of the tools of anthropology.

The latter is a description and explanation of social behavior in every possible environment—from the primitive to the sophisticated—in every part of the world. (Dennis and Aycock 41) In this regard, looking at how literature emerged and how it evolved, identifies the kind of society and the kind of people living in a certain era. II. Evolution & Era The discovery and/or development of a certain type of literature did not just happen in a flash. American Literature, the different types of it, sprouted in a seasoned manner.

This means that there would not be political writings, or none of them would be popular, if there were no political issues looming around the corner. It is quite amusing to know that American writing (in English) started not as a seriously intended literary piece but as a work " chiefly for the benefit of readers in the mother country. " (" American Literature"). These were the English travelers and explorers who became Americans during those olden times, circa 1583 to 1763.

Many people in the world have gone through untold suffering and despair and know exactly what a hard life is but none has seen it quite as much as

Angel, at least none that I have so far met. Now Angel is not the regular teenager whom you would expect to be fretting about boys, hairstyles, which parties to attend or what to wear. Angel has been to hell and back and such issues would seem petty if you were fortunate enough to meet her. Yes, I say fortunate to meet her because most of us trudge through life trifling about very unimportant things which do not matter at all while people go through real problems.

Angel is an embodiment of resilience and has proved it by living the life she has and come out triumphant. I met Angel last year while on a volunteer program at a shelter in Chicago, Illinois whose identity will remain undisclosed at the request of those involved. Angel was born 17 years ago to a single mother who was barely a teenager herself. Her father had gone to jail or so she was told whenever she asked. Her mother eked a living by working three jobs to support Angel and her three siblings; two sisters and a mentally challenged brother.

The first few years were bliss but she later found out that her mother was shielding her from most of the suffering. By the time she was ten, her mother had been ravaged by the pressure of her jobs and was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. To worsen matters she started doing drugs among other vices. A devout Christian had given up and Angel and her siblings started witnessing visits from strange men who apparently were her mother's boyfriends. There was a particular man who was a frequent guest and stayed longer. He was the meanest. He would beat up her mom, regardless of her condition.

Then he would turn on Angel and the other kids. Whenever she tried to protect them she would get bruises and broken bones. Her jaw was broken thrice in a p of less than a year and there was nothing she could do about it. As if this was not enough, the man would sneak into her bed every night after her mother had passed out and force himself on her. Angel was forced to leave school and take care of her brother and sister. When she thought things could not get any worse, her mother disappeared for days on end. Her lifeless body was found in a dark alley, stripped naked; apparently it was a drug overdose.

Then hell broke loose. Angel was left with two kids to take care of at the tender age of twelve. They moved from street to street and foster to foster since no relative would take them in. The things she did to ensure her siblings would live a semblance of a life were too much for a twelve year old. She faces each day at a time. Every morning she wakes up and looks to the sky and asks why her life had to be so rough, so early. Robbed of her childhood and innocence she can only hope for the best and thank the church that runs the shelter.

Perhaps she will never know the answers to the several questions she has but you can't help but admire her courage and hope that someday she will become someone. The system will be forced to eject her once she gets to 18 but she would rather not worry about that now, hope for a better future is all that keeps her going. Essay 2- Original Folk Tale. Since time immemorial, the art of story telling has been used as a source of entertainment and a way of transmitting knowledge and wisdom to the younger generations.

Perhaps there is nothing that is as universal as human beings and their ability to stretch their imagination to create stories with so much meaning and entertaining. Folk tales were laden with a group's culture, tradition and beliefs that were passed on for posterity. From the Americas to Asia and the African continent millions of folk tales abound and though the culture of story telling is fading, most of these tales have been documented for posterity and perhaps someday they will get the attention they deserve.

Once upon a time, the little red hen wanted to make bread and so she picked up some wheat grain and headed out. On her way to the farm she met the pig and asked whether she could help plant the wheat. The pig refused to offer any help and so the little red hen decided to plant the wheat by herself and it grew. One day on her way to pick some wheat she met the pig who was rolling in the mud. Once again she asked for her help in picking the wheat to which she refused again. Nobody in the animal kingdom was willing to help. (Williams, 2009)

When the little red hen went to the mill to get flour from her wheat she asked the dog whether he could help and he too refused adamantly. Very tired and weary, the hen climbed the hill and had her wheat ground. On her way back she met the cat and asked her to help her carry the flour to which the cat replied that she was too busy and therefore could not help. When she got home, the little red hen asked the cat and the duck to help her make bread. Both lazy animals refused to help her make the bread. The little red hen had no choice but to bake the bread herself which she did.

When the bread was ready, all the animals wanted a piece of it but the hen had it all by herself. (Williams, 2009) The story of the little red hen is a very

popular folk tale that extols the virtues of hard work and personal initiative. The moral of the story ultimately boils down to the fact that those people who have no intention of contributing to the production of a beneficial product should not expect to benefit from it. This folk tale also emphasizes the biblical teaching that he who does not work should not eat.

Frederick Douglass was blessed with many feathers in his hat including being a statesman, orator and author but he is best known for his profound contributions to civil and women liberties for which he fought for all his life. Born in 1818 near Maryland, Douglass was a firm advocate for the equal treatment of all people regardless of gender, color and whether they were Native American or immigrants. Douglass' turning point as a slave came in the form of fighting back against Edward Covey, a Maryland farmer and renowned slave breaker.

Douglass' perceived lack of respect had caused his former master Thomas Auld to send him to Covey perhaps in the hope that Covey would be able to break him. After several months of generous labor and repeated beatings, Douglass snapped one day and fought back. Covey was taken aback by the 16 year old's reaction, unnerved he was forced to back down. This action reenergized the young lad and a confidence grew in him that he should live free. From then on he knew that he had to disentangle himself from the bondage of slavery and free his fellow slaves. (Blassingame, 1979)

Being an American of Haitian origin is in itself a challenge. My grandparents migrated to the US several years ago with the hope of making a life for themselves and pursue the ever elusive ' American Dream. ' We live in the ghetto side of town and there is no easy way of telling how hard life is and

the kind of things we are exposed to ranging from drugs, prostitution and so many other vices. For most kids on the block, school is really optional and very few ever make it past the eighth grade. The indifference of adults does not help much most of whom do not even care to ask how their children are doing or what they are up to.

All they worry about is the payment of bills as they are due, everything else they leave to God and fate. It is against this background that I joined a local gang of six. Our activities ranged from carjacking, drug-peddling and robbing local convenience stores. My best friend, Curtis, was also a member of the gang and we have come a long way and through so much, he is like a blood brother. One day, Curtis and I were ordered to rob an African-American owned grocery store along the highway. When we go there, the proprietor's wife was manning the counter while her husband was in the back.

Curtis whipped out a weapon and ordered the lady to empty the till while I looked around for the police. Suddenly, I heard a gun shot and when I looked back Curtis lay in a pool of blood and the shotgun was aimed at me, I ran. When I got home, I could not believe what had just happened-that my best friend was probably dead and all for a few dollars. Then I heard the sirens and I knew they had come for me, I wondered how fast they had put the pieces together. I was whisked away to juvenile detention. No one from the gang ever came to see me not even making an appearance in court.

Then it hit me that I had lost my best friend for nothing, courtesy of the choices we had made. We did not have to be members of any gang nor did we have to drop out of school. There is so much more to life. There and then I resolved to make something out of my life at least in memory of my dear

friend. I first had to pay my debt to society then get back to school. Whatever the cost and however long it takes I vowed to change my life for the better and I did. I have come thus far and I thank God and the local youth support group for who I have become today, I would not even be here without their love, care and patience.

Born in 1856, Booker T. Washington was an African-American political leader, orator, author and educator. Washington's philosophy was based on the principles of racial solidarity, forgiveness, accommodation and self help. He urged the African American community to accept prejudice for the time and concentrate their energies on lifting their standards through hard work and material prosperity. Washington believed in the cultivation of virtues like patience and enterprise among the black community.

He believed that such virtues would earn Blacks some respect from the White community and ensure that they are fully integrated into the society as equal members. Undoubtedly, his philosophies put him on a collision course with notable leaders of the Black community especially W. E. B. DuBois with whom they differed bitterly. (Bauerlein, 2004) Booker T. Washington's philosophy can be summed up in the following quote, " With God's help, I believe that I have completely rid myself of any ill feeling toward the Southern white man for any wrong that he may have inflicted upon my race.

I am made to feel just as happy now when I am rendering service to Southern white men as when the service is rendered to a member of my own race. I pity from the bottom of my heart any Individual who is unfortunate as to get into the habit of holding race prejudice. " Washington's philosophy may be applied in the Jena Six case that happened in Jena, Louisiana in <https://assignbuster.com/african-american-studies/>

2006. The Jena Six were a group of six teenagers of African American origin who were convicted in the beating of Justin Barker, a white student at Jena High school.

The case has often been cited as an illustration of racial injustice because many people believed they were charged with grave offences and had received unfair treatment. The convictions of the six resulted in an escalation of racial tensions in the community. Many Jena residents viewed the arrests and ensuing convictions as racially prejudiced and unwarranted. Protesters argued that white youths involved in other incidents were treated mildly by the authorities. Massive protests were witnessed not only in Jena but in other US cities as well as the case received nationwide attention.

Booker T. Washington believed strongly that the African American community needed to address their safety and survival needs before seeking belonging, self esteem and self actualization within the community. In Jena, the Black community felt outnumbered and left out. This is illustrated by the emotional outpour that followed the arrests and convictions of the six teenagers. There were deep seated issues that had not been addressed and the Jena Six situation was actually the boiling point. The African-American community had been able to address their self esteem issues yet

Essay 5- Marcus Garvey/Harlem Renaissance Vs W. E. B Dubois/ReconstructionTime.

The Harlem Renaissance refers to a period between the 1920s and 30s which experienced the flowering of the intellectual life of the African-American community. Although the revolution was based mainly in Harlem, New York, its influence was felt across the world and more especially the in Paris, France where many French-speaking black writers from Africa and the

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Caribbean lived. Perhaps, the growth and p of the Harlem Renaissance can be attributed to the changes that had been experienced in the Black American community since the abolition of slavery and the advent of industrialization.

World War 1 and the social and cultural changes in the US at the turn of the 20th Century. Many black intellectuals played significant roles in the growth and sustenance of the renaissance including James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, Walter White and Jessie Fauset among many other prominent Black intellectuals of the time. The Renaissance did not receive unanimous support from the black intellectual community. In fact it received harsh criticism from black intellectual giants of the time including W. E. B Du bois, William Stanley Braithwaite and Benjamin Brawley.

These men did not believe in the nature of the Renaissance literature. (Wintz, 1988, p 130) Marcus Garvey, one of the most influential black leaders of the time had a strained relationship with the movement. Marcus came out as a critic of the renaissance. He is recorded as having hailed the Harlem Survey Graphic as being irrelevant to the Black cause. For instance he said of the Survey graphic that “ it was not built around the needs of Negroes and their grievances but their contributions-around talents still half buried in the napkins of prejudices and underprivileged. ” (Helbling, 1999, p60)

The Harlem Renaissance declined in numbers and influence in the early 1930s. The dissipation was gradual rather than sudden. The movement failed to attract new recruits and thus there was no injection of new ideas and this led to the stagnation of the once vibrant society. New writers actually strived hard to build and maintain an identity separate from the Renaissance even

as older writers were dying or cutting short their productivity. (Wintz, 1988, pg217) The term, Reconstruction, refers to the period that spread from the end of the 1865 American Civil War up till the withdrawal of the Union troops from the South in 1877.

It was a defining era in American history and more in particular that of the African Americans because of the end of slavery as an institution. The war had also bequeathed the North and South a considerable amount of anger and mistrust. The African American community met the end of the civil War with hope, joy and anxiety. (Stroud and Schomp, 2007) For a long time, many historians and leaders had viewed the Reconstruction as a colossal failure in US history. They claimed that the leaders of the time especially in the South were corrupt, evil and incompetent.

This view was however challenged by one of the most brilliant African American scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois who portrayed Reconstruction as a brave and fine fight in his book *Black Reconstruction in America*. He argued that the Reconstruction was a step in the right direction in terms of building a democratic society up from the vestiges of slavery. He acknowledged the existence of the crooked politicians but he adds that the evil of corruption was widespread in the post- Civil War era in both the North and the South among members of both the Republican and Democratic parties.

Du Bois goes ahead to support this era as being the time when significant strides were made in the economic and political standing of former slaves. His thoughts compelled many scholars to reshape their ideas on Reconstruction leading to a radically new analysis of one of the most

controversial periods in the history of the United States. (Stroud and Schomp, 2007, p65) The Harlem Renaissance and the Reconstruction Era were defining moments in the history of the United States. While both periods received massive criticism they were turning points that brought a lot of change during those respective periods.

Marcus Garvey and W, E. B Du Bois were critics of the Harlem Renaissance and did not see what it could contribute to the betterment of America. However, Du Bois comes out strongly to see the brighter side in the Reconstruction, a period that was tainted with a lot of controversy, twists and turns. We live the final judgment of these two eras to posterity. Essay 6- Nikki Giovanni/Black arts Vs Maya Angelou. Nikki Giovanni was born 66 years ago in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since 1987, she has taught writing and literature at Virginia Tech and she is a distinguished professor of English.

Nikki is one of the most widely read American poets and she still is committed to the fight for equality and civil rights. Giovanni began writing poetry in the 1960s at a time when she was associated with the Black Arts Movement. Giovanni was one of the most influential figures of the Black Arts movement along with Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez and Johari Amini among so many other leading lights. The Black Arts Movement emphasized the need for Black people to define the world in their own terms. The Black Arts Movement was intrinsically tied to the Black Power Movement in more ways than one.

It was considered its aesthetic and spiritual sister and envisioned an art that directly spoke to the needs and aspirations of Black America. The credo of the Black Arts Movement was Art is the Arm of the Revolution. " It was also

believed that all forms of Black Art were weapons whose sole reason for existence was to overthrow White oppression on all its forms. (Steele, 1998) Giovanni has always displayed profound interest in Black history and black identity. Much of her early poetry was inspired by the civil rights movement and the black power movement.

This influence is seen in her first works including *Black Feeling*, *Black Talk* and *Black Judgment*. The themes covered in these books are homogenous but their form, tone and style vary. The poems in these two collections touch upon political events of the time including Martin Luther King Jr's assassination alongside those of Malcolm X and President J. F. Kennedy. (Bloom, 1995) Nikki Giovanni has been described both as an evolutionary and a revolutionary poet. She is also known to speak her mind on prevailing issues that she holds dear ever since her days at the Black Arts Movement.

In a magazine article, she points out that the old virus of racism was still rampant in the American society. She goes on to acknowledge the Million Man March where thousands of Black men came together to seek love, oneness, atonement and support from one another. (Giovanni, 1996) Maya Angelou is not much different from Giovanni. Maya is a renown autobiographer and a poet. She has also been very active in the Civil Rights Movement. She has also taught at Wake Forest University in North Carolina.

Maya is a recognized and highly respected spokesperson for African American people and women. Her books have traditionally been centered on the themes of identity, racism and family. Maya Angelou was born in 1928 in St Louis, Missouri and she has documented most of her life in her bestselling autobiography, *I know why the Caged Bird Sings*. Maya has always

had a gift of bringing people together and she believes that people are more alike than they are different; Maya also believes that poetry can inspire a whole nation and its strength for the spirit.

Her works were inspired from an early age by African American writers like W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes and also renown European playwright William Shakespeare. Maya Angelou is no stranger to suffering and despair. Her parents had a divorce when she was still a kid forcing them to go live with their grandmother in Stamps. When they moved to Stamps with her brother Bailey, racism was the order of the day and the Blacks were expected to live on a separate side of town. Maya was sexually abused as a child and she had to go through a trial that led to the conviction of Mr.

Freeman. (Kite, 2006) Perhaps the differences between these two great women is the fact that their politics are far apart. Where Nikki chooses themes that are sometimes militant and takes strong political stands, Maya is more conciliatory and uses her gift to bring people together. Maybe this is because of the differences in the influences of their formative years. Giovanni was an active member of the Black Arts Movement which was seen to be radical in their approach to solving the issues affecting the African-American community.

It is not lost to the eye that both women are exceptionally talented and they have used their unique gifts to bring change to the American society and for that we owe them loads of gratitude. Both women are can actually be described as American living legends.

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