African American Literature

In her poem "Still I Rise," Maya Angelo writes, "Leaving behind nights of terror and fear/I nse/Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear/I nse/Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave, I rise." The history of African American literature bears witness to African Americans' struggle for their place in America. It is comprised of an eclectic mix of viewpoints and experiences that illustrate the characteristics and themes that define African American literature.

History of African American literature

African American literature is literature written by Americans of African descent. A broad focus of African American literature is to discuss issues such as identity, history, and the African American experience. African American literature emerged in the Colonial Era and is still popular today.

The Colonial Era

Jupiter Hammon, an enslaved person whose family allowed him to learn how to read and write, founded the genre in 1761 with the publication of his poem "An Evening Thought Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries" Hammon used his knowledge of the Bible to compose poetry and prose that couched his feelings about slavery in figurative language. Hammon encouraged his fellow African Americans to follow their morals because he believed having to live enslaved assured them their spot in Heaven.

Jupiter Hammon's conflicted beliefs about slavery reflect the complexity of the issue at that time. Hammon never desired freedom for himself. However, his speech "An Address to Negroes in the State of New York" (1787) shows that he disagreed with the institution of slavery and wanted freedom for others.

His poem, "An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley" (1778), was written to urge the first female African American poet. Phillis Wheatley, to pursue her literary career. Like Hammon, Wheatley used biblical allusions to discuss slavery. Wheatley was also outspoken about the impending Revolutionary War and compared being under English rule to slavery.

Although they never met, both writers were influential as the abolitionist movement to end slavery took flight because supporters could point to their intellect as evidence that African Americans could be educated and

The Abolitionist Movement and Civil War

The people pushing for slavery to be outlawed found slave narratives helpful in spreading awareness of their cause. Slave narratives are autobiographical accounts written by African Americans who were able to buy their freedom or escape their enslavers. Slave narratives allowed African Americans to share their version of the slavery experience. They gained popularity around the middle of the eighteenth century and were the primary form of African American literature in the nineteenth century.

- The Harlem Renaissance

The early twentieth century gave birth to a social and cultural revolution in the African American community known as the Harlem Renaissance. Named after the New York neighborhood where it originated, this golden age produced famous works across all artistic genres.

The development of African American newspapers created a space for fiction and nonfiction writers. African Americans published essays, poetry, articles, and prose popular in African American and white literary circles.

The Harlem Rennaisance gave African Americans control over their representation in American society and ushered in the Civil Rights movement. The Great Migration (1916-1970) contributed to the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans left the South during this period in droves due to the lack of economic opportunity and racism. Since World War One created a need for industrial workers, African Americans headed North to fill the gaps. The result was the creation of an urban activist culture that went toe-to-toe with racial, economic, and political obstacles.

The Civil Rights Movement

During World War Two, President Harry Truman desegregated the military, which bolstered African American self-identity. African American literature during this period targeted racial segregation and emphasized Black unity.

African American activists and authors used fictional and nonfictional genres to explore the concept of Black consciousness while debating solutions to the inequality and injustice they faced.

- Contemporary African American Literature As the twentieth century gave way to the twentyfirst, African American writers became part of mainstream literature. African American authors regularly receive accolades for their contributions to fiction and nonfiction.

Contemporary African American authors often focus on identity, history, and equality.

African American Literature Characteristics Characteristics that define African American literature include:

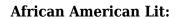
Inclusion of oral roots

African Americans pay homage to their rich oral tradition by weaving its components into their literature.

Repetition

African American Lit

O García



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that manages or controls all the cell functions in a eukaryotic cell nucleus 7 contains chlorophyll a green pigment that traps energy from sunlight and gives plants their green color chloroplast 8 digests excess or