

21 Famous Modern Black Authors You Should Know

Meta Description: In need of your next groundbreaking, trailblazing, immensely entertaining read? Discover the 21 best modern Black authors you must read!

From fiction to nonfiction, from poetry to memoirs, and from bestselling, household names to successful, fresh new authors, prepare to discover the 20 best modern Black authors whose works have made a profound impact on English literature!

Whether you're looking for an enchanting read about Black romance, historical fiction, or science fiction—or if you're searching for nonfiction poetry, autobiographies, and anthologies that detail the struggles with race and identity in the Black community—keep reading to take a glimpse at 20 Modern Black authors who have written eye-opening stories that you'll love!

About Famous Modern Black Authors You Should Know

This list includes a diverse set of writers from all different backgrounds who showcase their unique experiences and perspectives through rich writing and inspirational works of both fiction and nonfiction.

From tackling issues such as the search for identity, the acceptance of family, and experiences with newfound love to the thought-provoking topics of racial injustice, feminism, and poverty, these authors have written impactful stories that have continued the conversations surrounding Black struggles and highlighted Black excellence just as well.

So, if you're looking for an author who knows how to write a moving novel that'll be sure to get the wheels in your head turning or one who knows how to create a magical fictional world for you to get lost in, get ready to dive into this article which highlights just a few of the best modern Black authors!

21 Famous Modern Black Authors

Jacqueline Woodson

Best known for her books: *Miracle's Boys*, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, and *After Tupac and D Foster*, Jacqueline Woodson is an acclaimed author who has made her mark on the Children's and Young Adult genres.

The recipient of The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award—the world's largest award for children's and young adult literature—and the prestigious MacArthur "Genius" Award, Woodson has managed to tackle issues of race, gender, and class in a digestible way that children of all ages can understand.

Her books have tackled issues that were rarely discussed in books for adolescents at the time of their publishing, such as teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, and interracial relationships.

Brown Girl Dreaming is a memoir that tells the story of Jacqueline's childhood as she grew up in the South and Brooklyn, New York through the 1960s and 1970s.

[You can find *Brown Girl Dreaming* here.](#)

Phoebe Robinson

Phoebe Robinson is a writer, comedian, and actress who is best known for her movies, *Ibiza* and *What Men Want*, her TV show, *2 Dope Queens*, and her essay collection, *You Can't Touch My Hair: And Other Things I Still Have to Explain*.

Though she's written other books, *You Can't Touch My Hair* is by far the most popular.

It's a compilation of the comedian's hilarious yet honest essays which deal with themes of race and feminism and acts as somewhat of a guide for what not to say and do to Black women.

The writing in the novel is poignant and makes for a thought-provoking and very much worthwhile read.

[You can find *You Can't Touch My Hair* here.](#)

Brit Bennett

With her very first novel, *The Mothers*, becoming a New York Times bestseller and a National Book Critics Circle award finalist, and her second novel, *The Vanishing Half* making it onto everyone's must-read list in 2020, Brit Bennett has quickly become a prominent figure in Black literature.

She has published several nonfiction essays, but it's her fictional novels that have garnered the attention and affection of readers worldwide. Her critically acclaimed sophomore novel, *The Vanishing Half*, explores the lives of twin sisters, Desiree and Stella, who split up and live two vastly different lives.

Desiree lives as a Black woman, in a poor community where she faces racism constantly. Stella passes for white and struggles with her identity as she pretends to be something she isn't.

You can find [The Vanishing Half](#) here.

Marlon James

The author of five novels, Marlon James' passion for writing shines through in his novels—and in his persistence to get them published!

His first novel, *John Crow's Devil*, tells the story of a biblical struggle that took place in a Jamaican village in 1957. The novel was rejected 70 times before it was finally accepted for publication.

James' most famous novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, has twelve narrators and tells the story of the attempted assassination of Bob Marley in 1976. The novel also explores postcolonial society—from the crack wars in 1980s New York to a fundamentally altered Jamaica in the 1990s.

The complex novel showcases Marlon James' unique writing and submits his place among the other literary legends of his generation.

[You can find A Brief History of Seven Killings here.](#)

Yaa Gyasi

At just 26 years old, Yaa Gyasi won the National Book Critics Circle's John Leonard Award for best first book, the American Book Award, and the National Book Foundation's "5 under 35" honors for 2016.

All awards earned with her debut novel, *Homegoing*, which is a historical fiction novel that—similarly to *The Vanishing Half*—tells the story of two sisters and their family throughout several generations.

The novel explores the impact that the transatlantic slave trade had and has on the lives of those who lived through it and those who came after. The powerful story also shows the ways in which two sisters who don't know of each other's existence can go down two totally different paths.

[You can find *Homegoing* here.](#)

Jesmyn Ward

The only woman and only African American to win the National Book Award for Fiction twice, Jesmyn Ward is a novelist and professor who has published three critically acclaimed novels.

Her 2011 novel, *Salvage the Bones*, follows a working-class family living in poverty as they prepare for and deal with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The compelling novel explores the brutal reality of poverty while showing the importance of family and community.

[You can find *Salvage the Bones* here.](#)

Rivers Solomon

Receiving the Community of Literary Magazines and Presses' Firecracker Award in Fiction for their debut novel, *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, and the Lambda Literary Award for their second novel, *The Deep*, River Solomon has helped pave the way for minority writers with their books.

Solomon is a non-binary Black person on the autism spectrum and has been inspired to write about marginalized communities in their novels, which often tackle social issues while calling for more representation.

The harrowing science fiction novel, *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, follows a queer scientist, Aster, who lives in the slums of the HSS Matilda—a space vessel that is very much similar to the antebellum South.

The book explores oppression and resistance with eloquent writing and potent imagery that captivates the reader effortlessly.

[You can find *An Unkindness of Ghosts* here.](#)

Jasmine Guillory

A New York Times Bestselling contemporary romance writer who was also named a Publishers Weekly Flying Start author, Jasmine Guillory is your go-to-gal if you're looking for Black romance writers!

She made writing her career in 2018 after publishing her debut novel, *The Wedding Date*, which is a multicultural romance that follows Alexa Monroe and Drew Nichols' fast-paced love story.

Guillory has since become one of the most popular Black romance authors in recent times.

[You can find *The Wedding Date* here.](#)

Talia Hibbert

A favored author of contemporary and paranormal romance, Talia Hibbert is known for the diversity that is ever-present in her writing. Her characters' races, ethnicities, sexualities, and body shapes vary book by book, and her novels often cover heavy topics such as race, class, and sexuality while also providing lighthearted and engaging romance.

Her infamous 2019 novel, *Get a Life, Chloe Brown*, covers the topic of medical discrimination as the main character, Chloe, lives with chronic pain.

Despite her struggles, she is determined to become a more interesting person and experience new things—with the help of her mysterious and devilishly handsome neighbor.

[You can find *Get a Life, Chloe Brown* here.](#)

Amanda Gorman

Only 24 years old, Amanda Gorman is already the first National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States, the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history, and was even given the opportunity to recite her original poem, *The Hill We Climb*, at the 2021 Inauguration of President Joe Biden.

Her work often covers the topics of oppression, marginalization, and the African diaspora. In 2015, at just 16, she published her poetry book, *The One for Whom Food Is Not Enough*. She has since published popular novels, *Call Us What We Carry* and *The Hill We Climb*.

The latter is a collection of poetry which includes the title poem—the outstanding work that she recited at President Biden’s Inauguration.

[You can find *The Hill We Climb* here.](#)

Danez Smith

Danez Smith is a queer, non-binary, and HIV-Positive poet who is best known for their poetry collection, *Don't Call Us Dead*, which explores themes of race, life and death, sexuality, HIV, police violence, and many more hard-hitting topics in a fierce yet lyrical style that is sure to enthrall everyone who takes the time to read it.

The book won the Forward Prize for Best Collection and was a finalist for the National Book Award for Poetry.

[You can find *Don't Call Us Dead* here.](#)

Nicola Yoon

The first Black woman to hit #1 on the New York Times Young Adult bestseller list, Nicola Yoon’s novels, *The Sun Is Also a Star* and *Everything, Everything*, took the world by storm!

Everything, Everything, tells the story of 18-year-old Madeline Whittier, who is being treated for severe combined immunodeficiency, and Olly Bright, who wants to help her experience a life worth living.

The two fall in love and take a trip together—and Madeline soon realizes that her whole life has been a lie.

The successful novel received a movie adaptation that was released in 2017.

[You can find *Everything, Everything* here.](#)

Paul Beatty

The first writer from the United States to ever win the Man Booker Prize, Paul Beatty is a poet and essayist who is best known for his 2015 novel, *The Sellout*—the recipient of the award!

The satirical novel takes place in the fictional town of Dickens, California, and explores racial identity in the United States and the historical effects of racism. The book is also a commentary on race relations and criminal justice in the US.

[You can find *The Sellout* here.](#)

Julian Winters

Known for writing LGBTQ character-driven stories, Julian Winters' most popular novel is *Running with Lions*, a coming-of-age story about “a boy’s high school soccer team full of gay, straight, bi, and questioning teenagers who all love the shit out of each other.”

The sweet romance novel is just one of the few that Winters has written to give a louder voice to queer characters in the romance genre.

[You can find *Running with Lions* here.](#)

Renée Watson

A poet, educator, and the author of several children's books, Renée Watson is best known for her Coretta Scott King Author Award-winning young adult novel, *Piecing Me Together*.

The novel tells the story of Jade, who feels out of place amongst her white peers. She’s won a scholarship and now attends a predominantly white private school despite living in poverty.

Even while living in a world that seemingly wants to break her down, the ambitious girl is determined to find her place in the world and become successful.

[You can find *Piecing Me Together* here.](#)

Akwaeke Emezi

Best known for their novels *Freshwater*, *Pet*, and *The Death of Vivek Oji*, Akwaeke Emezi is a writer of romance, speculative fiction, and poetry with LGBT themes. In 2021, they were featured as a Next Generation Leader in Time and were the recipient of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize.

In *Pet*, a teen girl named Jam is living in Lucille, a Utopian town in the US that isn't quite what it seems. From the plot summary:

“In Lucille, there are no more monsters. Or so everyone believes, but one day, Jam trips and falls onto her mother's painting (a type of assemblage with sharp objects incorporated within.) Jam's blood releases the creature that her mother painted: Pet. Pet informs Jam that it is here to hunt a monster living in Lucille.”

[You can find *Pet* here.](#)

Jason Reynolds

Jason Reynolds is an esteemed author best known for his poetry and novels written for young adult and middle-grade audiences. One of his infamous novels, *Long Way Down*, is an exploration of gun violence and grief.

15-year-old Will is determined to avenge his brother's death after he's shot and killed. He takes his brother's gun and sets out to kill the person who he believes murdered his brother, but he experiences conflicting emotions as he tries to skate the thin line between right and wrong.

You can find [Long Way Down](#) here.

Kacen Callender

The renowned author of children's fiction and fantasy, Kacen Callender is best known for their novel, *Felix Ever After*. The novel follows a Black, trans boy named Felix who sets out to get revenge when an anonymous bully begins sending him transphobic messages.

Along the way, he ends up falling in love—and entering a love triangle despite having been convinced that he would never find love due to being a part of one too many marginalized groups.

The novel is a Stonewall Honor Book and Time Magazine Best YA Book of All Time winner.

[You can find *Felix Ever After* here.](#)

Nora Keita Jemisin

The recipient of the Hugo Award for Best Novel, Nebula Award for Best Novel, and Audie Award for Science Fiction, Nora Jemisin is a science fiction and fantasy author whose works often cover issues such as oppression and cultural conflicts.

One of her fan-favorite works, *The Fifth Season*, is an apocalyptic fantasy that touches on the topics of oppression and revolutions while telling the story of a woman who is forced to hide her secret power in order to find her kidnapped daughter when the world ends.

[You can find *The Fifth Season* here.](#)

Kosoko Jackson

Kosoko Jackson is a loud and proud advocate of diversity in Young Adult literature. His stories usually include Queer Black characters, and his well-liked novel, *Yesterday Is History*, is no different.

Andre Cobb receives a much-needed liver transplant and is ready to finally start living his life the way he wants to live it, but then he passes out and wakes up again...In 1969. Suddenly, he finds himself torn between two loves—one in the past and one in the present.

The emotional novel is full of love, loss, and life lessons for both Andre and the reader.

[You can find *Yesterday Is History* here.](#)

BONUS: Eric Jerome Dickey

Known for his mystery, suspense, and erotic romance fiction novels, Eric Jerome Dickey published his first novel, *Sister, Sister*, in 1996 and continued publishing wildly successful books until his passing in 2021.

Sister, Sister was deemed to be one of the 50 Most Impactful Black Books Of The Last 50 Years after its release, and Dickey would go on to write 30 more novels—20 of which made him a New York Times bestselling author.

[You can find *Sister, Sister* here.](#)

Final Thoughts

This article showcases just 20 of the modern Black authors that have made their mark on the literary world with their rich and eloquent writing, immense creativity, and inspirational testimonies about the Black experience.

I hope you were able to find a few voices that resonated with you with the help of this article!

Faqs

Who is the most popular Black author?

Maya Angelou is one of the most popular Black authors of all time.

Who is the best-selling Black author of all time?

Zane appears to be the best-selling Black author of all time.

Who is the world's most widely read modern African author?

Chinua Achebe is one of the world's most widely recognized and praised writers.

What was the first best-selling novel by an African American?

Home to Harlem by Claude McKay.