

Category: Powerful Voices

Genre: Famous Black Authors

Powerful Voices: 40 Famous Historical Black Authors You Should Know - Ultimate Guide

Meta Description: For centuries, there have been plethoras of powerful Black voices in English literature. Here are 40 groundbreaking, must-know Historical Black Authors for you to read next!

From slavery and segregation, abolition, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and beyond, the world of literature has been shaped into what it is today by the countless contributions of these incredible literary figures. These African American trailblazers paved the way for Black writers today and captured the minds and hearts of millions of people in the process!

Through their writing, these talented authors have managed to elucidate the many struggles of Black people and give a voice to the oppressed, leaving a lasting impact on American society and encouraging change with their captivating and lucid writing.

From the poetry of Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou to the timeless classics of Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston, to the contemporary masterpieces from Gayl Jones and Walter Mosley, we'll be taking a look at these powerful voices and their most famous works!

If you're looking to expand your knowledge of history-making Black authors and the significance of Black literature in our world today, keep reading!

About Historical Black Authors You Should Know

These 40 phenomenal authors have broken down barriers and accomplished many firsts for African Americans. They've also given Black people in America a voice throughout several

generations, highlighting various issues such as racism, inequality, marginalization, poverty, and the trauma that comes along with these encounters.

Through their evocative and sometimes unorthodox writing, these authors have unapologetically covered taboo and controversial topics, starting conversations that are still relevant to this day.

Black culture is bountiful, rich, and diverse, and Black literature is no different. From bringing light to the incomprehensible struggles that African Americans have faced throughout history to spotlighting the victories, these authors have managed to perfectly capture the highs, lows, and in-betweens of the Black experience.

Using their writing as a form of empowerment and resistance, these writers have inspired generations to find their own voices, tell their own stories, and keep the conversations going as well.

In this Ultimate Guide, we'll be taking a closer look at these influential authors and the wide array of topics, styles, and genres that they've made their marks on throughout history.

From essays, poetry, memoirs, and fiction, real-life experiences and fictional adventures, household names, and little-known authors, this article will have something for everyone—whether you're a frequent reader of Black literature or just starting your journey into this extraordinary world—so stay tuned!

40 Famous Historical Black Authors You Should Know

Phillis Wheatley

Despite being enslaved, Phillis Wheatley was the first African-American woman to publish a book of poetry. Her first and only book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, was published in 1773 and was read and praised by both black and white readers alike.

The poems covered topics such as morality, freedom, religion, and her experiences as an enslaved person. The book made history, being reviewed in major literary journals of the time

and allowing her to act as an influential voice during the abolitionist movement as well as eventually allowing her to buy her and her son out of slavery.

Her poetry garnered attention from essential figures such as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Hancock, and Dr. Benjamin Rush—who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

[You can find *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* here.](#)
[You can find Phillis Wheatley's other works here.](#)

William Wells Brown

Considered a pioneering figure of African American literature, William Wells Brown was a playwright, activist, and a man of many firsts.

He was one of the first African American writers to use the genre of travel writing to describe his experiences with both American and European society, and one of the first African American men to speak publicly on the matter of women's rights, which he was an advocate for.

He was also one of the first African American men to publish a novel. *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* was published in 1853 and tells the story of a mixed-race slave girl named Clotel, who is alleged to be the daughter of Thomas Jefferson and his slave mistress.

The fictional novel was also read and received well by white and black audiences alike.

[You can find *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter* here.](#)
[You can find William Wells Brown's other works here.](#)

Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou is an infamous author known for her powerful voice and unique autobiographical writing style. She published three books of essays, seven autobiographies, and several books of poetry.

She has also been credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows, including titles like *Poetic Justice* (1993) and *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006).

In 2011, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom—which is the highest civilian honor—by President Barack Obama. In 2013, she was awarded the second-highest civilian award in the United States, the Presidential Citizens Medal.

Her first and most famous book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, is an autobiography that details the events of her life from childhood to age 16. Written in a powerful, lyrical style and considered to be a classic of African American literature, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* tells the story of Angelou's struggles with racism, sexual abuse, and finding her self-worth.

[You can find *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* here.](#)

[You can find Maya Angelou's other works here.](#)

Langston Hughes

One of the main leaders of the Harlem Renaissance and one of the earliest innovators of jazz poetry, Langston Hughes is considered to be one of the most important figures in African American literature today.

He was the first African American to earn a living solely from his writing, and his play, *Mulatto*, was the first play written by an African American to ever be produced on Broadway. Hughes' first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, is abundantly praised for its vivid portrayal of the African American experience.

His poem, *Let America Be America Again* is considered to be one of the most powerful poems of the 20th century, and one of his most popular poems, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, celebrates the durability of Black heritage while making a connection between it and four great rivers.

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

[You can find Langston Hughes' other works here.](#)

Alice Walker

Best known for her most popular novel, *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker is an acclaimed novelist and social activist. She was the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, which she won for *The Color Purple*.

She was also awarded The Langston Hughes Medal In 2011 for her superlative contributions to American literature.

In addition to *The Color Purple*, some of her most famous works include: *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*, a critically acclaimed short-story collection, *Meridian*, which follows a young black woman in the late 1960s who embraces the civil rights movement during a time when the movement had become violent, and *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker's first nonfiction collection.

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

[You can find Alice Walker's other works here.](#)

Amiri Baraka

Known for his politically charged and controversial writing, Amiri Baraka was a founder and leader of the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. His books are known for their exploration of class, race, and politics.

Some of his most popular works include *Dutchman*, a play that explores power dynamics through a confrontation between a black man and white woman on a subway, *Blues People*, a non-fiction book that explores the history and cultural significance of jazz and the blues, and *The System of Dante's Hell*, which follows a young black nomad as he lives in big cities and small towns in the Southern United States.

[You can find *The System of Dante's Hell* here.](#)

[You can find Amiri Baraka's other works here.](#)

Bell Hooks

Best known for her clear style of writing on race, feminism, and class, Bell Hooks was a pillar of the Black feminist writing movement. Her first full-length book and one of her most popular novels to date, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, was picked as one of the 100 most important feminist books of the 20th century.

Another of her novels, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* helped influence a new wave of feminism that was inclusive of women of color, queer women, and women in the working class.

Her novel, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*, gave insight into the ways in which traditional masculinity was harmful to men and society as a whole, and was highly praised for its discernment of the human experience.

[You can find *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* here.](#)

[You can find Bell Hooks' other works here.](#)

Ishmael Reed

Known for his satirical works which challenge America's political culture, Ishmael Reed is a poet, essayist, and novelist who has produced several fictional works that commentate on racism.

One of his most popular novels, *Mumbo Jumbo*, is a satirical novel set in 1920s New York. It combines science fiction and historical fiction to tell the story of "Jes Grew", an ancient force that greatly impacts the African American community.

[You can find *Mumbo Jumbo* here.](#)

[You can find Ishmael Reed's other works here.](#)

Octavia Butler

Octavia Butler paved the way for black women in and out of the sci-fi genre. She was the first black woman to gain popularity as a science fiction writer and the first science fiction writer—of any race or gender—to receive the MacArthur Fellowship "Genius" Grant.

Her most popular novel, *Kindred*, follows a young African American woman named Dana who is transported back in time to the antebellum South. She meets a slave owner who also happens to be one of her ancestors and is then forced to confront the terrors of slavery and the profound racism of her own ancestors.

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

[You can find Octavia Butler's other works here.](#)

Richard Wright

Among the first African American writers to protest white treatment of Blacks, Richard Wright was known for writing about African Americans' struggles with discrimination and violence.

His autobiographical memoir, simply titled *Black Boy*, details his childhood and young adult years in the South, plus his eventual move to the North. In it, he writes about his struggles growing up in poverty and being raised by his mother and grandmother.

Another of his best-known books, *Native Son*, tells the story of Bigger Thomas, who accidentally kills a white woman and becomes involved in a legal battle that displays the racial inequalities and injustices of American society.

[You can find *Native Son* here.](#)

[You can find Richard Wright's other works here.](#)

Sonia Sanchez

A leading figure in the Black Arts Movement, Sonia Sanchez is a poet and professor who has written over a dozen books of poetry, as well as short stories, children's books, plays, and critical essays.

Her first book of poetry, *Homecoming*, explores the black experience as well as themes of family and identity, and her second and most political work, *We a BaddDDD People*, superscribes the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s.

Her novel, *Homegirls and Handgrenades*, addresses the struggles of Black women in America and the Black feminist movement.

[You can find *Homegirls and Handgrenades* here.](#)

[You can find Sonia Sanchez's other works here.](#)

Ralph Ellison

Though he only published one novel during his lifetime, it was outstanding enough to land him on this list!

Described as a renaissance man, Ellison believed that America had created a space for African Americans to create their own culture, which was a view that black separatists and protest writers did not share—and a view that helped to make him an important writer of the early civil rights movement.

His lone novel, *Invisible Man*, is a story of the human condition and follows an unnamed Black narrator and his experiences in the 1930s. *Invisible Man* is an important part of African American literature and is still being read and studied today.

[You can find *Invisible Man* here.](#)

Gloria Naylor

Known for her nuanced portrayals of Black women, Gloria Naylor was the winner of the National Book Award for first fiction in 1983. Naylor's most popular work and the winner of the award, *The Women of Brewster Place*, follows the lives of seven African-American women who live in a rundown housing project in an urban neighborhood.

The book displays the importance of community and was later made into a miniseries starring Oprah Winfrey, Cicely Tyson, and Jackée Harry—just to name a few members of the all-star cast.

[You can find *The Women of Brewster Place* here.](#)

[You can find all of Gloria Naylor's works here.](#)

James Baldwin

Known for his powerful and analytical writing, James Baldwin was a civil rights activist and writer whose works helped raise awareness and start conversations about sexual and racial oppression.

Go Tell It on the Mountain was Baldwin's first novel, and is a semi-biographical story about a teenage boy growing up in Harlem in the 1930s. It's a coming-of-age novel that explores sexuality, religion, and the boy's complicated relationship with his father.

[You can find *Go Tell It on the Mountain* here.](#)

[You can find James Baldwin's other works here.](#)

Alice Childress

Recognized as, “the only African-American woman to have written, produced, and published plays for four decades”, Alice Childress was highly praised for her writing’s realism and her ability to capture the struggles and conquests of everyday African American people.

Her best-known book, *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life*, is a collection of short stories that were first published in “Freedom” magazine between 1956 and 1957.

These stories portray the lives of domestic workers in New York City and the struggles they face, including exploitation and discrimination.

She is also known for her novel, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But A Sandwich*, which is about a 13-year-old boy who is addicted to heroin.

[You can find *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But A Sandwich* here.](#)

[You can find Alice Childress’ other works here.](#)

Frederick Douglass

After escaping slavery, Frederick Douglass became famous for his astute antislavery writings. His first autobiography—the first autobiography by a black man to be written and published—*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, was widely read and discussed in the United States and Europe after becoming a best-seller during its time.

His third autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, was considered one of the most detailed accounts of the life of a former slave during that time.

[You can find *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* here.](#)

[You can find Frederick Douglass’ other works here.](#)

Toni Morrison

Perhaps best known for her novel, *Beloved*, Toni Morrison was the first Black woman to ever receive The Nobel Prize in Literature, which she won with her most popular novel.

Based on a true story, *Beloved* follows a former slave named Sethe as she is haunted by the ghost of her dead child. The novel was soon turned into a movie starring Oprah Winfrey as Sethe.

Her other extremely popular novels include *The Bluest Eye*, which follows three young Black girls growing up in Ohio during the 1930s as they navigate race and beauty standards, and *Song of Solomon*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award and garnered Morrison national attention for the first time.

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

[You can find Toni Morrison's other works here.](#)

W.E.B Du Bois

The first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University, William Edward Burghardt was a prolific writer and historian who was known for his groundbreaking work. His infamous book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, contains a series of essays that explore race—more specifically, double consciousness, the “color line”, and the psychological toll that racism takes on a person.

[You can find *The Souls of Black Folk* here.](#)

[You can find W.E.B Du Bois' other works here.](#)

Gayl Jones

Known as "one of the most versatile and transformative writers of the 20th century" and deemed a literary legend, Gayl Jones' debut novel was published when she was just 25.

Edited by Toni Morrison and highly praised by James Baldwin, *Corregidora* is a story about a character named Ursa Corregidora, a blues singer whose ancestors were enslaved by the Corregidora family. The novel explores both the lasting trauma and the lasting legacy of slavery.

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

[You can find Gayl Jones' other works here.](#)

Paul Dunbar

Known for his use of “Negro dialect” and credited as the “first writer to put the African American experience in all its diverse forms before a broader audience”, Paul Dunbar was a diverse author who wrote short stories, poems, ballads, and operettas.

He wrote the lyrics for 1903's "In Dahomey", which was the first all-Black Broadway musical. He was also the first African American to be widely accepted within the literary field in the United States and the first African-American poet to garner national critical acclaim.

His first volume of poetry, *Oak and Ivy*, reflects the delight and struggle of everyday life of African Americans as well as his pride in his African American heritage.

[You can find *Oak and Ivy* here.](#)

[You can find Paul Dunbar's other works here.](#)

Shirley Graham Du Bois

An essential figure in Black theatre, Shirley Graham (who later married W.E.B Du Bois) wrote many plays, operas, and biographies which cast light upon the average Black American's experience at the time.

She wrote her late husband's memoir, *His Day is Marching On - A Memoir of W. E. B. Du Bois* along with biographies on Phillis Wheatley, George Washington Carver, and Booker T. Washington.

[You can find *His Day is Marching On - A Memoir of W. E. B. Du Bois* here.](#)

[You can find Shirley Graham Du Bois' other works here.](#)

Alex Haley

Often credited for "kickstarting a wave of interest in genealogy and pride in African roots among Black people in America in the 1970s" and best known for his novel-turned-movie, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, Alex Haley was known for documenting the lives of Africans during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade throughout the Civil Rights Movement.

Roots is a historical novel that tells the story of Haley's ancestors, beginning with an African man who was captured and brought to the United States as a slave in the 18th century and continuing throughout the family's history over the course of several generations.

The book won the 1977 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and was turned into a miniseries and aired to a record-breaking audience of 130 million television viewers in the same year.

Haley is also known for his book, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, which was co-written with Malcolm X and published in 1965. The memoir is considered to be one of the most influential books about the Civil Rights Movement.

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

[You can find Alex Haley's other works here.](#)

Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde was a womanist and radical feminist who dedicated her life to confronting racism, homophobia, classism, and sexism. She received many accolades throughout her career.

The Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Black Feminist Organization, Literary Lions Award from the New York Public Library, and The Robert Fitzgerald Prosody Award, just to name a few.

One of her most popular works is the semi-autobiographical novel, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, which was published in 1982 and details Lorde's experiences as a Black lesbian growing up in Harlem during the 1940s and 1950s.

[You can find *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* here.](#)

[You can find Audre Lorde's other works here.](#)

Paule Marshall

The daughter of poor immigrants from Barbados, Paule Marshall's works often covered the topics of colonialism, the experiences of immigrants, race, and ethnic identity. Her most popular book, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, is a coming-of-age novel that tells the story of a young girl growing up in Brooklyn in the 1930s and 1940s.

Marshall was the recipient of the MacArthur "Genius" Grant in 1992, the National Endowment for the Arts Award, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Literature.

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

[You can find Paule Marshall's other works here.](#)

Lorraine Hansberry

The first African-American female author to have a play performed on Broadway, Lorraine Hansberry was a civil rights activist best known for her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, which follows an African-American family living in a small apartment on the South Side of Chicago in the 1950s.

The play explores poverty and the image of the American Dream through the eyes of the family. *A Raisin in the Sun* is considered to be a classic American drama and is studied and performed in schools and theaters globally.

[You can find *A Raisin in the Sun* here.](#)

[You can find Lorraine Hansberry's other works here.](#)

Sterling A. Brown

A literary critic, folklorist, and the first Poet Laureate of the District of Columbia, Sterling A. Brown is best known for his poetry and erudition of Black culture.

Southern Road, his most popular work, is a powerful collection of his poetry about the South and the general Black experience in it.

[You can find a collection of Sterling A. Brown's poems here.](#)

Ida Wells

Ida Wells, an early leader in the Civil Rights Movement, was a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She was also an investigative journalist and newspaper editor. She is best known for her speeches and articles on the issue of lynching in the United States, especially in the South.

She wrote articles and editorials about the need for anti-lynching laws that were published in newspapers such as *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Age*, and even in her own newspaper, the *Memphis Free Speech*, and *Headlight*.

Her most well-known book, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, helped raise awareness about the issue of lynching with statistics regarding how frequently the punishment

was distributed and the various causes of the lynchings, as well as her investigations into multiple cases.

[You can find *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* here.](#)

[You can find Ida Wells' other works here.](#)

Chester Himes

Chester Himes worked as a screenwriter and produced two psychological fiction novels, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and *The Lonely Crusade* but he is best known for his *Harlem Detective* series, which consists of nine crime fiction novels set between the 1950s and the early 1960s. The novels follow two African American policemen named Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson.

Himes is known as one of the most prolific Black mystery writers to date.

[You can find book #1 of the *Harlem Detective* series, *A Rage in Harlem* here.](#)

[You can find Chester Himes' other works here.](#)

Gwendolyn Brooks

The first African American ever to receive a Pulitzer Prize, Gwendolyn Brooks was known for her poignant portrayals of ordinary Black people's struggles and successes. The Pulitzer Prize winner, her second book, *Annie Allen*, is a collection of poems that highlights the life of a young Black woman living in Chicago throughout her childhood and into adulthood.

[You can find Gwendolyn Brooks' essential poems here.](#)

[You can find Gwendolyn Brooks' other works here.](#)

Samuel Delany

Known for his Science Fiction and use of Mythology within his works, Samuel Delany is the first major African American science fiction writer as well as one of the most influential writers within the genre in the United States. He was inducted into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame in 2002.

Openly gay since his childhood, one of his most famous novels, *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*, follows the lives of gay men in the distant future in a human-populated, utopian society by the name of Triton.

[You can find *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia* here.](#)

[You can find Samuel Delany's other works here.](#)

Rubie Saunders

Not much is known about Rubie Saunders, but one thing is for sure: her fiction was groundbreaking. She was the editor for the teen magazine, *Calling All Girls*—later titled *Young Miss* from 1963 to 1979, but she published her first fiction novel in 1969.

Nurse-Doctor romances were popular and plentiful at the time, but *Marilyn Morgan, R.N.* was one of the first to be written by a Black author, as well as one of the first to feature Black characters—Main characters, at that.

Saunders is also considered to be one of the first Black authors to write romance fiction for a major publisher, and after her fourth novel, *Nurse Morgan Sees It Through* was published, it would be nine years before another romance by a Black author with Black characters was published by a major publisher again.

[You can find *Marilyn Morgan, R.N.* here.](#)

[You can find Rubie Saunders' other works here.](#)

John Oliver Killens

A founding member of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters, John Oliver Killens created the popular phrase, "kicking ass and taking names", in his first novel, *Youngblood*.

The novel focuses on an African American family—the Youngbloods—as they struggle with oppression and racism while living in the South under the Jim Crow law during the 20th century.

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

[You can find John Oliver Killens' other works here.](#)

Elsie Bernice Washington

Called "the mother of the African-American romance", though she only published one novel, it too made history. Her novel, *Entwined Destinies*, was published in 1980 and follows an African American female magazine reporter who finds true love with a Black oil executive. It was described as "the first known romance featuring African American characters written by an African-American author".

This seems to have been disproven since Rubie Saunders published her romance novels years before, but Washington's novel still made history by starting a revolution in POC romance novels.

[You can find *Entwined Destinies* here.](#)

James Weldon Johnson

A leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, James Weldon Johnson was a diplomat, lawyer, composer, and writer. He wrote the lyrics for the song that is considered to be the Black national anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*.

In addition to that, he wrote *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, a fictional narrative of his own experiences as a light-skinned African American man who passes as white during post-Reconstruction era America.

[You can find *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* here.](#)

[You can find James Weldon Johnson's other works here.](#)

Angela Davis

An academic, philosopher, and political activist, Angela Davis is known for her work on social justice, gender, and race. Considered to be one of the most important scholars of her time and a certified icon, she wrote *Women, Race, and Class*, a classic feminist read that analyzes race, class, and gender.

The book examines white feminism and the ways in which white feminists failed to address the struggles of black women—and why the fight for women's rights must include all women.

[You can find *Women, Race, and Class* here.](#)
[You can find Angela Davis' other works here.](#)

Walter Mosley

Deemed to be one of America's greatest crime-fiction writers, Mosley has written upwards of 50 books across a multitude of genres, including his bestselling mystery series which follows detective Easy Rawlins.

Some of his most popular books include *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *A Red Death*, *White Butterfly*, and *Black Betty*. The latter—the fourth book in the *Easy Rawlins* series—is set in the late 1940s and tackles themes of race and justice as detective Rawlins enters a race against time while trying to find a missing woman and clear his name before the police can find him.

[You can find *Black Betty* here.](#)
[You can find Walter Mosley's other works here.](#)

Ramona Lofton (Sapphire)

You know Sapphire even if you think you don't know Sapphire.

Anyone who was conscious back in 2009 can remember the heartbreaking (and frankly traumatizing for those of us who were way too young to be watching it) movie, *Precious*, which follows a 16-year-old girl who is living in poverty, pregnant with her father's child, and who happens to be the sole subject of her mother's constant abuse.

The movie was based on Sapphire's 1996 novel, *Push*. Some people loved them and some people hated them, but regardless, both the novel and the movie have had a major impact on Black culture.

[You can find *Push* here.](#)
[You can find Sapphire's other works here.](#)

Beverly Jenkins

A contemporary and historical fiction author known for her strong and memorable Black female leads, Beverly Jenkins has been leading the charge for multicultural romance since the 90s. She was the first African American author to win the RITA Award, which is the highest award given by the Romance Writers of America.

The award winner—and Jenkins' first book—*Night Song* tells the story of Cara Lee Henson, who must overcome the challenges that come along with being a single mother and come to terms with her past in order to find love in the future.

[You can find *Night Song* here.](#)

[You can find Beverly Jenkins' other works here.](#)

Zora Neale Hurston

Filmmaker, anthropologist, and author of four novels, Zora Neale Hurston is considered to be one of the most important writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Her writing often explores the complexities of African American existence, and her classic novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is a great example of that.

Janie Crawford is an African-American woman living in the South during the early 1900s and searching for self-fulfillment as she goes through three marriages, poverty, and a plethora of other hardships all while refusing to live in fear or bitter sorrow.

[You can find *Their Eyes Were Watching God* here.](#)

[You can find Zora Neale Hurston's other works here.](#)

Claude McKay

Another central figure during the Harlem Renaissance, Claude McKay was a Jamaican poet whose writing focused on the lives of working-class people of color. Today, McKay is said to have “paved the way for Black poets to discuss the conditions and racism they faced in their poems.”

One of his most popular works, a novel titled *Home to Harlem*, follows Jake, a young man from the South who travels to Harlem in search of a new life and a sense of belonging in the ever-changing world of 1920s Harlem.

[You can find *Home to Harlem* here.](#)

[You can find Claude McKay's other works here.](#)

Final Thoughts

Mystery or crime, romance fiction or science fiction, poetry or memoirs—regardless of what you were looking for, I hope you've found it within this article and can enjoy reading the various works of the pillars of the Black Literature community!

FAQs

Who is the most famous Black author?

Maya Angelou is considered to be the most famous black author.

Who was the most influential Black writer in the history of American literature?

Langston Hughes is considered to be the most influential black writer.

Who was the first Black writer in America?

Phillis Wheatley.

Who was the first Black man to write an autobiography?

Frederick Douglass.

Who was the first Black American woman to have a full-length novel published?

Harriot E. Wilson.

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

Home to Harlem by Claude McKay.

Who was the first Black female writer to win a Pulitzer Prize?

Gwendolyn Brooks.