The Cambridge Companion to African American Women’s Literature covers a period dating back to the eighteenth century. These specially commissioned essays highlight the artistry, complexity and diversity of a literary tradition that ranges from Lucy Terry to Toni Morrison. A wide range of topics are addressed, from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts movement, and from the performing arts to popular fiction. Together, the essays provide an invaluable guide to a rich, complex tradition of women writers in conversation with each other as they critique American society and influence American letters. Accessible and vibrant, with the needs of undergraduate students in mind, this Companion will be of great interest to anybody who wishes to gain a deeper understanding of this important and vital area of American literature.

Angelyn Mitchell is Associate Professor of English and African American Studies, Georgetown University.

Danille K. Taylor is Dean of Humanities, Dillard University.

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.
To our mothers,
Gertrude Mann Taylor (1915–2005)
and
Evelyn Wiggins Mitchell,
and
to Adam Taylor Guthrie and Carille Mary Nicole Guthrie,
my home-Mom
La vida es un carnival!  ~ Celia Cruz
CONTENTS

List of contributors ix
Acknowledgements xii
Chronology of major works and events xiii

Introduction
ANGELYN MITCHELL AND DANILLE K. TAYLOR 1

I. HISTORY, CONTEXTS, AND CRITICISM 13
1. Early African American women’s literature
FRANCES SMITH FOSTER AND LAROSE DAVIS 15

2. Women of the Harlem Renaissance
CHERYL A. WALL 32

3. Women writers of the Black Arts movement
ELEANOR W. TRAYLOR 50

4. Contemporary African American women writers
DANA A. WILLIAMS 71

5. African American feminist theories and literary criticism
ROBERT J. PATTERSON 87

II. GENRE, GENDER, AND RACE 107
6. African American women and the United States slave narrative
JOYCelyn MOODY 109

7. Autobiography and African American women’s literature
JOANNE M. BRAXTON 128
CONTENTS

8. “Even some fiction might be useful”: African American women novelists
   MADHU DUBEY 150

9. African American women poets and the power of the word
   KEITH D. LEONARD 168

10. African American women in the performing arts
    OLGA BARRIOS 187

11. African American women writers of children’s and young adult literature
    DIANNE JOHNSON 210

12. African American women essayists
    MARILYN SANDERS MOBLEY 224

13. African American women writers and the short story
    CRYSTAL J. LUCKY 245

14. African American women writers and popular fiction: theorizing black womanhood
    HERMAN BEAVERS 262

Bibliography 278
Index 301
CONTRIBUTORS


HERMAN BEAVERS is an associate professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Wrestling Angels into Song: The Fictions of Ernest J. Gaines and James Alan McPherson* (1995), as well as over twenty-five articles and book chapters. He guest-edited issues of both *African American Review* and *Narrative*, and he either served or is serving on the editorial boards of *American Literature, Modern Fiction Studies, Modern Literary Studies*, and *African American Review*. His creative works include the chapbook, *A Neighborhood of Feeling* (1986).


LAROSE DAVIS, who recently earned a Ph.D. at Emory University, is a lecturer of English at Spelman College.

MADHU DUBEY is a professor of English and African American Studies at the University of Illinois in Chicago. She is the author of *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (1994) and *Signs and Cities: Black Literary Postmodernism* (2003). She is currently working on a book about Octavia Butler.

FRANCES SMITH FOSTER is Charles Howard Candler Professor of English and Women’s Studies at Emory University. She has authored, edited, or co-edited ten books and numerous articles, including *Written by Herself: Literary Production by*


**CRYSTAL J. LUCKY** is an associate professor of English, African American Studies and Women’s Studies at Villanova University, where she currently directs the Africana Studies Program. She has published on Toni Morrison and on women of the Harlem Renaissance.

**ANGELYN MITCHELL** is an associate professor of English and African American Studies at Georgetown University, where she founded the African American Studies Program. She is the author of The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women’s Fiction (2002) and the editor of Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present (1994).

**MARILYN SANDERS MOBLEY** is Vice President for Inclusion, Diversity, and Equal opportunity at Case Western University. She is the author of Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison: The Cultural Function of Narrative (1992). She is currently completing Spaces for Readers: Toni Morrison’s Narrative Poetics and Cultural Politics.

**JOYCELYN MOODY** is the Sue Denman Distinguished Chair of Literature at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is the author of Sentimental Confessions (2001) and editor of the African American Review.

**ROBERT J. PATTERSON** is an assistant professor of English at Florida State University. He is currently working on a book entitled, Are Many Called, But Few Chosen? The Paradox of Closeness in Contemporary Literature, Politics, and Culture.
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

DANILLE K. TAYLOR is dean of humanities and professor of English at Dillard University. She is the editor of Conversations with Toni Morrison (1994) and has published on African American literature and culture.

ELEANOR W. TRAYLOR is a professor of English and chair of the English department at Howard University. She has published widely on many key figures in African American literary studies, including Margaret Walker, Henry Dumas, and Toni Cade Bambara.


DANA A. WILLIAMS is an associate professor of English and director of undergraduate studies in the English department at Howard University. She is the author of “In the Light of Likeness – Transformed”: The Literary Art of Leon Forrest (2005), and she is the editor of The Art of August Wilson and Black Aesthetics (2004) and Conversations with Leon Forrest (2007).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1526</td>
<td>First Africans brought to North America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1730</td>
<td>Lucy Terry thought to be born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1746</td>
<td>Terry composes “Bars Fight,” the earliest known piece of literature by an African American.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1753–55</td>
<td>Phillis Wheatley thought to be born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1757</td>
<td>Phillis Wheatley bought by John Wheatley in Boston.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1775–83</td>
<td>The American Revolutionary War.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>In Philadelphia, the first antislavery society is formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>The Declaration of Independence is ratified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Death of Phillis Wheatley.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1787</td>
<td>The Three-fifths Compromise approved by Congress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>Haitian Revolution begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1793</td>
<td>The first Fugitive Slave Law is passed by Congress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1796</td>
<td>Lucy Terry, the first woman to argue before Supreme Court, wins her case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1797</td>
<td>Sojourner Truth is born in New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Gabriel Prosser’s revolt against slavery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>Haiti established as the second independent nation in the Americas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1808  The importation of enslaved Africans to the United States is prohibited.
1821  Death of Lucy Terry.
1822  Harriet Tubman thought to be born. Denmark Vessey’s revolt against slavery.
1830  The end of the transatlantic slave trade.
1831  Nat Turner’s revolt against slavery. Maria Stewart’s “Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build” published.
1832  Maria Stewart becomes the first American woman to participate in public political debates, on the lecture circuit in Boston.
1835  Maria Stewart, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*.
1836  *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*.
1849  Harriet Tubman emancipates herself and becomes a conductor on the Underground Railroad.
1851  Sojourner Truth addresses the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention with her now famous “And Ain’t I a Woman?” speech.
1852  Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.
1853  Frances E. W. Harper publishes *Eliza Harris*.
1855 After being passed down orally for over one hundred years, Lucy Terry’s poem, “Bars Fight,” is published.

1857 In the Dred Scott decision, the Supreme Court rules against African American citizenship.


1861–65 The American Civil War.

1861 Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

1862 President Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing enslaved African Americans in rebel states.

1864 The Fugitive Slave Laws are revoked.

1865 Black Codes are established, laws designed to restrict the rights of African Americans and to reestablish the social conditions of slavery. General Sherman’s Field Order No. 15, allocating forty acres and a mule, sets aside land for newly emancipated African American families in the South. Mary Church Terrell is born. Terrell later works as a civil rights activist, lecturer, and suffragist. President Abraham Lincoln is assassinated. The Freedman’s Bureau is established to attend to the needs of newly emancipated blacks. The Thirteenth Amendment is ratified, and enslaved African Americans are freed throughout the United States.

1866 Congress passes the first Civil Rights Act in order to counter the Black Codes.


1868 The Fourteenth Amendment grants citizenship and “equal protection” under the law to all citizens, including African Americans. Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes; or, Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House*.

1869 The National Women’s Suffrage Association is founded.
Chronology

1870 African American men’s right to vote is protected under the Fifteenth Amendment.

1877 The end of Reconstruction is signaled by the removal of federal troops from the South.

1883 Death of Sojourner Truth.

1890 Amelia Johnson, *Clarence and Corinne or God’s Way*.

1891 Lucy Delaney, *From the Darkness Cometh the Light*; Emma Dunham Kelley, *Megda*.


1895 Mary Church Terrell becomes the first African American woman to sit on the Washington, DC, Board of Education. Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, *Violets and Other Tales*; Emma Dunham Kelley, *Four Girls at Cottage City*; Ida Wells-Barnett publishes *A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States*.

1896 The National Association of Colored Women is established. The Supreme Court ruling “separate but equal” in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case supports racial segregation in the United States.

1897 Death of Harriet Jacobs.

1899 Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*.

1900 Pauline E. Hopkins publishes *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South*.


1909 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded.

1910–30 Large numbers of African Americans move from the South to the North in “The Great Migration.”

1910 *The Crisis*, the literary magazine of the NAACP, begins publication.
1913 Death of Harriet Tubman, legendary conductor of the Underground Railroad.

1914–18 World War I.

1914 Death of abolitionist Charlotte Forten Grimké.

1916 Angelina Weld Grimké’s play Rachel is performed in Washington, DC.

1917 Gwendolyn Brooks is born. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

1918 Georgia Douglas Johnson, The Heart of a Woman and Other Poems.

1919 High numbers of lynchings and race riots in the US, known as the “Red Summer of 1919.”

1920 Women are granted voting rights by the Nineteenth Amendment. The beginning of what is known as the Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Renaissance.

1922 Georgia Douglas Johnson, Bronze.

1924 Jessie Fauset, There Is Confusion.

1925–27 The Crisis and Opportunity hold annual literary contests.


1926 Negro History Week begins. Fire!, a literary journal, is published by Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Wallace Thurman.

1927 Marita Bonner, The Pot Maker.

1928 Marita Bonner, The Purple Flower; Georgia Douglas Johnson, An Autumn Love Cycle; Nella Larsen, Quicksand.

1929 The Great Depression begins with the US stock market crash on “Black Tuesday.” Marita Bonner, Exit: An Illusion; Jessie Fauset, Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral; Nella Larsen, Passing.

1931 Toni Morrison is born. Nine black boys are accused of raping two white girls in Scottsboro, Alabama.

1932 Shirley Graham’s play-turned-opera, Tom-Tom: An Epic of Music and the Negro, opens in Cleveland.
1934 Zora Neale Hurston publishes *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*.

1935–40 Works Progress Administration (WPA) provides work for artists and writers.


1938 Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse*.

1939 Zora Neale Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain*.

1940 Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*.

1941–45 US involvement in World War II.

1941 President Truman orders the desegregation of the Armed Forces and the federal government.

1942 Zora Neal Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*; Margaret Walker, *For My People*. Margaret Walker is the first African American poet to win a national award, the Yale Younger Poets Award.

1944 Katherine Dunham establishes the Katherine Dunham School of Dance in New York, a major African American cultural institution until its closing a decade later.

1945 Gwendolyn Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville*.

1946 Ann Petry’s *The Street* is published; it later becomes the first novel by a black woman to sell more than a million copies.

1947 Octavia Butler is born. Ann Petry, *County Place*.

1948 Ntozake Shange is born. Dorothy West, *The Living Is Easy*.


1951 Terry McMillan is born. Rosa Guy (with John O. Killens) forms the Harlem Writers Guild.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Rita Dove is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>The <em>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</em> case overturns the <em>Plessy</em> ruling of “separate but equal.” Rosa Guy, <em>Venetian Blinds</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Emmett Till is abducted and murdered in August. In December Rosa Parks sparks the Montgomery Bus Boycott by refusing to give up her seat on a bus. Alice Childress wins Obie Award for <em>Trouble in Mind</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Nine African American students are barred from attending school in Little Rock, Arkansas. Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) founded. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 signed by President Eisenhower provided additional protection for African American voters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded. Death of Zora Neale Hurston.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr. awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in the civil rights movement. Freedom Summer is launched after three civil rights workers are murdered in Mississippi. Adrienne Kennedy’s first play, <em>Funnyhouse of a Negro</em>, is produced. Ann Petry, <em>Tituba of Salem Village</em>; Kristin Hunter, <em>God Bless the Child</em>. Civil Rights Act of 1964 signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Death of Nella Larsen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1965–73  Vietnam War.


1967  Urban revolts erupt in Detroit, Newark, and Chicago.

1968  Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated in Tennessee. Gwendolyn Brooks becomes poet laureate of Illinois. Shirley Chisholm becomes the first African American woman elected to congress. Senator Robert Kennedy is assassinated in California. The National Black Theatre founded by Barbara Ann Teer. Gwendolyn Brooks, “In the Mecca”; Nikki Giovanni, Black Feeling, Black Talk; Mari Evans, Where Is All the Music?; Lorraine Hansberry, To Be Young, Gifted, and Black; Kristin Hunter, The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou; June Jordan, Who Look at Me; Audre Lorde, The First Cities; Anne Moody, Coming of Age in Mississippi; Carolyn Rodgers, Paper Soul; Alice Walker, Once.

1969  The first Department of Black Studies founded at San Francisco State. Alice Childress, Wine in the Wilderness; Lucille Clifton, Good Times; Nikki Giovanni, Black Judgement; Paule Marshall, The Chosen Place, the Timeless People; Arthenia Millican, Seeds Beneath the Snow: Vignettes from the South; Carolyn Rodgers, Songs of a Black Bird and 2 Love Raps; Sonia Sanchez, Homecoming; Sarah E. Wright, This Child’s Gonna Live.

1970  Angela Davis makes FBI’s “most wanted” list. Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings; Toni Cade [Bambara] (ed.), The Black Woman; Mari Evans, I Am a Black Woman; Nikki Giovanni, Re: Creation; June Jordan, His Own Where; Audre
chronology

Lorde, Cables to Rage; Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye; Louise Meriwether, Daddy Was a Number Runner; Sonia Sanchez, We a BaddDDD People; Alice Walker, The Third Life of Grange Copeland; Margaret Walker, Prophets for a New Day.

1971

Maya Angelou, Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water ’fore I Diiie; Toni Cade Bambara (ed.), Tales and Stories for Black Folks; Nikki Giovanni, Gemini; Elaine Jackson, Toe Jam; June Jordan, His Own Where.

1972

Shirley Chisholm becomes the first black woman to run for president. Barbara Jordan becomes the first black woman from the South to serve in the House of Representatives. Toni Cade Bambara, Gorilla, My Love; Gwendolyn Brooks, Report from Part One; Lucille Clifton, Good News about the Earth; Nikki Giovanni, My House; Pinkie Gordon Lane, Wind Thoughts; Alice Walker, Five Poems.

1973

The Roe v. Wade case prohibits state restrictions on abortions. Sarah Webster Fabio, Rainbow Signs; Audre Lorde, From a Land Where Other People Live; Toni Morrison, Sula; Alice Walker, Revolutionary Petunias and In Love & Trouble: Stories of Black Women; Margaret Walker, October Journey.

1974

Virginia Hamilton becomes the first African American to win the Newbury Medal. Maya Angelou, Gather Together in My Name; Angela Jackson, Voodoo/Love Magic; Audre Lorde, The New York Head Shop and Museum.

1975

Death of Josephine Baker. Alice Walker publishes her tribute to Zora Neale Hurston in Ms., rescuing her from obscurity and reviving interest in her work. Maya Angelou, Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well; Gayl Jones, Corregidora; Carolyn Rodgers, bow i got ovah: New and Selected Poems; Ntozake Shange, for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf; Sherley Anne Williams, Peacock Poems; Paulette White, Love Poem to a Black Junkie.

1976

Barbara Jordan is the first black woman to deliver a keynote address at a national political party convention. Maya Angelou, Singin’ and Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry Like Christmas; Octavia Butler, Patternmaster; Gayl Jones, Eva’s Man; Audre Lorde,
Chronology

Coal; Mildred Taylor, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry; Alice Walker, Meridian.

1977
Toni Cade Bambara, The Sea Birds Are Still Alive; Octavia Butler, Mind of My Mind; Joanne Braxton, Sometimes I Think of Maryland; Wanda Coleman, Art in the Court of the Blue Fag; “The Combahee River Collective Statement”; Rita Dove, Ten Poems; Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon; Ntozake Shange, Sassafrass.

1978
The Supreme Court rules against quotas on college admissions, but approves selected affirmative action programs. Maya Angelou, And Still I Rise; Octavia Butler, Survivor; Eloise Greenfield, Honey I Love; Pinkie Gordon Lane, The Mystic Female; Audre Lorde, The Black Unicorn; Carolyn Rodgers, The Heart as Ever Green; Ntozake Shange, Nappy Edges.

1979
Octavia Butler, Kindred; Wanda Coleman, Mad Dog, Black Lady; Colleen McElroy, Winters without Snow; Alice Walker (ed.), I Love Myself When I Am Laughing: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader.

1980
Ntozake Shange wins the Obie Award for Mother Courage. Toni Cade Bambara, The Salt Eaters; Gwendolyn Brooks, Primer for Blacks; Octavia Butler, Wild Seed; Barbara Christian, Black Women Novelists; Rita Dove, The Only Dark Spot in the Sky and The Yellow House on the Corner; Joyce Hansen, The Gift-Giver; Audre Lorde, The Cancer Journals; Carolyn Rodgers, Translation.

1981
Death of Harlem Renaissance writer Gwendolyn Bennett. Maya Angelou, The Heart of a Woman; bell hooks, Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism; Andrea Lee, Russian Journal; Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (eds.), This Bridge Called My Back: Writing By Radical Women of Color; Toni Morrison, Tar Baby; Sonia Sanchez, I’ve Been a Woman: New and Selected Poems; Ntozake Shange, Three Pieces; Mildred Taylor, Let the Circle Be Unbroken; Alice Walker, You Can’t Keep a Good Woman Down.

1982
Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (eds.), All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies; Audre Lorde, Zami: A New
Spelling of My Name and Chosen Poems: Old and New; Gloria Naylor, The Women of Brewster Place; Ntozake Shange, Sassafrass, Cypress, and Indigo; Alice Walker, The Color Purple. Sherley Anne Williams, Some Sweet Angel Chile.

1983
Gloria Naylor wins the American Book Award for The Women of Brewster Place. Alice Walker is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for The Color Purple. Maya Angelou, Shaker Why Don’t You Sing; Pearl Cleage, Hospice; Wanda Coleman, Images; Toi Dericotte, Natural Birth; Rita Dove, Museum; Marita Golden, Migrations of the Heart; Jamaica Kincaid, At the Bottom of the River; Paule Marshall, PraiseSong for the Widow and Reena and Other Stories; Barbara Smith (ed.), Homegirls: A Black Feminist Anthology; Claudia Tate (ed.), Black Women Writers at Work; Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose.

1984

1985
Barbara Christian, Black Feminist Criticism; Michelle Cliff, The Land of Look Behind; Rita Dove, Fifth Sunday; Rosa Guy, My Love, My Love, or The Peasant Girl; Jamaica Kincaid, Annie John; Pinkie Gordon Lane, I Never Scream; Gloria Naylor, Linden Hills; Ntozake Shange, Betsey Brown.

1986
Maya Angelou, All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes; J. California Cooper, Homemade Love; Audrey Lorde, Our Dead behind Us; Sherley Anne Williams, Dessa Rose.

1987
Rita Dove wins the Pulitzer Prize for Thomas and Beulah (1986). Maya Angelou, Now Sheba Sings the Song; Octavia Butler,
Chronology

1988
Toni Morrison wins the Pulitzer Prize for Beloved. Octavia Butler, Adulthood Rites; Wanda Coleman, War of Eyes and Other Stories; Rita Dove, The Other Side of the House; Jamaica Kincaid, A Small Place; Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light; Gloria Naylor, Mama Day.

1989

1990

1991
Anita Hill testifies at the Senate confirmation hearings of then Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Lucille Clifton, Quilting: Poems 1987–1990; J. California Cooper, Family; Gayl Jones, Liberating Voices: Oral Tradition in African American Literature; Pinkie Gordon Lane, Girl at the Window; Paule Marshall, Daughters.

1992
The first black woman, Carol Moseley Braun (Democrat–Illinois), is elected to the US Senate. Death of Audre Lorde. Rita Dove, Through the Ivory Gate; Mari Evans, A Dark and Splendid...
Chronology


1993


1994

Rita Dove is the first African American named US poet laureate. First “Furious Flowering Conference,” organized by Joanne Gabbin.

1995


1996


1997


1998

CHRONOLOGY

1999  
Rosa Parks is awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Death of Sherley Anne Williams. Sonia Sanchez, Shake Loose My Skin: New and Selected Poems; Sister Souljah, The Coldest Winter Ever.

2000  

2001  
The World Trade Center in New York City attacked by terrorists. Trudier Harris, Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African American Literature; Zane, Addicted.

2002  

2003–present  
The Iraq War.

2003  
Toni Morrison, Love; Zane, The Heat Seekers.

2004  
Zane, Nervous.

2005  
Hurricane Katrina floods New Orleans, creating the largest black diaspora since the African slave trade. Death of Rosa Parks. The Color Purple opens on Broadway. Bebe Moore Campbell, 72 Hour Hold; Cheryl Wall, Worrying the Line.

2006  
Karline Stephens publishes her memoir, Confessions of a Video Vixen. Alice Walker, We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting for. Deaths of Octavia Butler, Bebe Moore Campbell, Coretta Scott King, and Nellie Y. McKay.