

*Do not be afraid to sing
your own song.*

—Annie Long Tom (Clayoquot),
“A Dream Song”

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THE HEATH ANTHOLOGY OF AMERICAN LITERATURE

Spring 1999 • Number 19

n e w s l e t t e r

The Heath Top 100

by Paul Lauter

Here is the news for which you have all been waiting: the results of our own poll about the most significant twentieth-century books of fiction in English. As you may recall, many people were appalled by the Modern Library's singularly self-interested list of the 100 best. So we asked readers of the Heath Newsletter—which goes to about as large a constituency of college and university teachers of American literature as can be reached—to register their views on the subject, however silly the whole process may be. Many of you have done so, and this is what our handy-dandy, unscientific, and no doubt unrepresentative, poll shows.

The Top 25:

- Toni Morrison, *Beloved*
- Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*
- William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*
- F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
- William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom*
- James Joyce, *Ulysses*
- John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*
- Richard Wright, *Native Son*
- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

(Up to this point, the results were well differentiated; as the list continues, there were more ties.)

- Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*
- Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

- Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*
- Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*
- George Orwell, *1984*
- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*
- Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
- Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*
- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*
- William Faulkner, *Light in August*
- J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*
- William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*
- Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*
- Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*
- James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
- Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

The Heath Newsletter *has been designed as a forum for people teaching American literature. Though we do, as in the present issue, extend our coverage to matters of broader interest to scholars in the field, our primary intention is to provide readers with material helpful in the classroom.*

If you wish to share classroom work in which you are engaged—approaches to groups of writers, strategies for dealing with problems of coverage and concentration, particularly successful teaching tactics, and the like—please be in touch with us. We are genuinely interested in opening the Newsletter to as many users of the Heath Anthology, and other teachers of American literature, as we can.

(continued)

The Top 25 are followed by:

E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India*
Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita*
Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*
Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio*
Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*
Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine*
Henry James, *The Ambassadors*
Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*
D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*
D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*
Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*
Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*
Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*
John Updike, *Rabbit Run*

In general, this list... displays a far broader range not just of authors ...but of the kinds of experiences readers think are significant.

A few reflections and details: 9 of our top 25 (and 15 of the first 40), very high proportions, were not on the Modern Library list. These included all the books by women of color—Morrison, Hurston, Silko, Walker, Kingston—but also Achebe's novel, and different books—*Absalom, Absalom, My Antonia, Mrs. Dalloway*—by authors the lists share. In general, this list—no surprise coming from folks interested in the *Heath Anthology*—displays a far broader range not just of authors (far more women and writers of color), but of the kinds of experiences readers think are significant.

Another way of saying this: the difference between this poll and that published by the Modern Library measures a process of change,

especially in the American literary canon. The Modern Library's board, dominated by traditional (primarily white and male and older) critics, can be seen as having produced a kind of earlier benchmark, what many of us were taught to see as defining literary value some 40 or 50 years ago. This poll, however skewed it may be (and I suspect it is far more representative), shows how that traditional canon has been modified. In part, that has happened by the displacement of certain texts, works like *The Way of All Flesh, The Good Soldier, Studs Lonigan, The Call of the Wild, Point Counter Point*, just to name a few among the 29 of the Modern Library's 100 not even mentioned once in our poll. In part, that has happened through the addition of works by writers like Morrison, Hurston, Silko, Walker, Kingston, Erdrich, O'Connor, and Atwood (all of whom were among our top 40) altogether unrecognized in the Modern Library poll.

In significant ways, this poll suggests, the racial and gender exclusivity of earlier American culture has successfully been challenged...

The story, then, is one of permanence and change: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* was named by a remarkable 63 percent of our respondents (and her early novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was among the 26–40 group). But as the list of the first 25 indicates, Faulkner is the novelist mentioned the most: eight of his works are cited. Cather comes close with seven; Lessing, Morrison, Wharton,

and Woolf have five works each mentioned, though not as frequently. In significant ways, this poll suggests, the racial and gender exclusivity of earlier American culture has successfully been challenged, and there are some

... what this vivid diffusion of cultural authority offers is... challenging opportunities to build freshness and difference into our classrooms.

meaningful steps toward redefining "British literature" to include writers of "colonial" origins as well. A total of 61 different books were named on at least four ballots, a total of 86 on three or more, and 337 by at least one respondent. All of this indicates that the comfort of a broadly agreed-upon "core" of texts is as frayed as our cat has left the sofa. Some will read this to mourn that the center has not, alas, held. For many of us, however, what this vivid diffusion of cultural authority offers is, on the contrary, challenging opportunities to build freshness and difference into our classrooms.

COMPLETE SURVEY RESULTS

- Absalom, Absalom!* (William Faulkner) —17
- The Accidental Tourist* (Anne Tyler)
- The Age of Innocence* (Edith Wharton) — 4
- Alas Babylon* (Pat Frank)
- The Alexandria Quartet* (Lawrence Durrell) — 4
- All the King's Men* (Robert Penn Warren) —5
- All the Pretty Horses* (Cormac McCarthy) —3
- The Ambassadors* (Henry James) — 6
- American Pastoral* (Philip Roth)
- An American Tragedy* (Theodore Dreiser) —3
- Angle of Repose* (Wallace Stegner) — 4
- Animal Farm* (George Orwell) —4
- Another Country* (James Baldwin)
- Arcadio* (William Goyen)
- As I Lay Dying* (William Faulkner) —9
- The Assistant* (Bernard Malamud)
- Atlas Shrugged* (Ayn Rand)
- At Play in the Fields of the Lord* (Peter Matthiessen)
- The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (Gertrude Stein)
- Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (James Weldon Johnson)
- The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (Ernest J. Gaines)
- Babbitt* (Sinclair Lewis) —2
- Bailey's Café* (Gloria Naylor)
- Ballad of the Sad Café* (Carson McCullers)
- Barabbas* (Emery Bekessy)
- The Bear* (William Faulkner)
- The Bell Jar* (Sylvia Plath) —2
- Beloved* (Toni Morrison) —29
- A Bend in the River* (V. S. Naipaul) —3
- Between the Acts* (Virginia Woolf)
- The Blacker the Berry* (Wallace Thurman)
- The Black Prince* (Iris Murdoch) —2
- Bless Me, Ultima* (Rudolfo Anaya)
- Blood and Guts in High School* (Kathy Acker)
- The Bluest Eye* (Toni Morrison) —7
- The Bone People* (Keri Hulme)
- The Bonfire of the Vanities* (Tom Wolfe)
- The Book of Daniel* (E. L. Doctorow)
- Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley) —3
- Bread Givers* (Anzia Yezierska) —3
- Breath, Eyes, Memory* (Edwidge Danticat)
- Brideshead Revisited* (Evelyn Waugh) —4
- Brown Girl, Brownstones* (Paule Marshall)
- Buffalo Afternoon* (Susan Schaeffer)
- The Burger's Daughter* (Nadine Gordimer) —2
- Call It Sleep* (Henry Roth) —2
- Cane* (Jean Toomer) —4
- The Catcher in the Rye* (J. D. Salinger) —10
- Catch-22* (Joseph Heller) —9
- The Catherine-Wheel* (Jean Stafford)
- Cat's Cradle* (Kurt Vonnegut)
- Cat's Eye* (Margaret Atwood) —2
- Ceremony* (Leslie Marmon Silko) —12
- China Men* (Maxine Hong Kingston)
- Cider House Rules* (John Irving)
- A Clockwork Orange* (Anthony Burgess) —2
- Cold Mountain* (Charles Frazier)
- The Collector* (John Fowles)
- The Color Purple* (Alice Walker) —11
- A Confederacy of Dunces* (John Kennedy Toole) —2
- The Confessions of Nat Turner* (William Styron)
- The Convert* (Elizabeth Robins)
- Corregidora* (Gayl Jones)
- The Counterlife* (Philip Roth) —2
- The Crying of Lot 49* (Thomas Pynchon)
- The Custom of the Country* (Edith Wharton)
- A Dance to the Music of Time* (Anthony Powell)
- Darkness at Noon* (Arthur Koestler)
- Darkness in St. Louis, Bearheart* (Gerald Vizenor)
- Daughter of Earth* (Agnes Smedley) —2
- The Day of the Locust* (Nathanael West) —2
- A Death in the Family* (James Agee) —2
- The Death of the Heart* (Elizabeth Bowen)
- Deliverance* (James Dickey) —2
- Diaries of Jane Sommers* (Doris Lessing)
- A Different Drummer* (Clive Egleton)
- Dinner at Homesick Restaurant* (Anne Tyler)
- Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Philip K. Dick)
- The Door into Summer* (Robert Heinlein)
- East of Eden* (John Steinbeck) —2
- Ellen Foster* (Kaye Gibbons)
- The English Patient* (Michael Ondaatje)
- Ethan Frome* (Edith Wharton) —3
- Eustace Chisholm and the Works* (James Purdy)
- Fall on Your Knees* (Ann-Marie MacDonald)
- A Farewell to Arms* (Ernest Hemingway) —11
- Farewell, My Love* (Raymond Chandler)
- Felicia's Journey* (William Trevor)
- The Female Man* (Joanna Russ)
- The Fifth Child* (Doris Lessing)
- The Fixer* (Bernard Malamud)
- The Floating Opera* (John Barth)
- Fools Crow* (James Welch) —2
- For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Ernest Hemingway) —2
- The Four-Gated City* (Doris Lessing)
- Foxfire* (Joyce Carol Oates)
- The French Lieutenant's Woman* (John Fowles) —3
- Fried Green Tomatoes* (Fannie Flagg)
- Galapagos* (Kurt Vonnegut)
- A Gathering of Old Men* (Ernest J. Gaines)
- Gaudy Night* (Dorothy L. Sayers)
- Ghost Dance* (Carole Maso)
- The Gift* (H. D.)
- Giles Goat-Boy* (John Barth)
- God Knows* (Joseph Heller)
- The God of Small Things* (Arundhati Roy)
- Go Down Moses* (William Faulkner)
- Going after Cacciato* (Tim O'Brien)
- The Golden Bowl* (Henry James) —2
- The Golden Notebook* (Doris Lessing) —4
- Gone with the Wind* (Margaret Mitchell) —3
- Goodbye to All That* (Robert Graves)
- Goodbye Columbus* (Philip Roth)
- The Good Earth* (Pearl S. Buck) —2
- Good Morning, Midnight* (Jean Rhys)
- Go Tell It on the Mountain* (James Baldwin) —4
- Gormenghast* (Mervyn Peake)
- A Grain of Wheat* (Ngugi Wa Thiong'o)
- The Grapes of Wrath* (John Steinbeck) —17
- Gravity's Rainbow* (Thomas Pynchon) —7
- The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald) —21
- The Greenlanders* (Jane Smiley)
- Grendel* (John Gardner) —2
- The Group* (Mary McCarthy)
- The Handmaid's Tale* (Margaret Atwood) —6
- Heart of Darkness* (Joseph Conrad) —10

- The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (Carson McCullers) —3
- Henderson the Rain King* (Saul Bellow)
- Herzog* (Saul Bellow)
- Hopeful Monsters* (Nicholas Mosley)
- The Horse's Mouth* (Joyce Cary)
- The House behind the Cedars* (Charles Chesnutt)
- The House of Breath* (William Goyen)
- Housekeeping* (Marilynne Robinson) —6
- House Made of Dawn* (N. Scott Momaday) — 2
- The House on Mango Street* (Sandra Cisneros) —3
- The House of Mirth* (Edith Wharton) —8
- Howard's End* (E. M. Forster) —4
- I, Claudius* (Robert Graves)
- In the Beauty of the Lilies* (John Updike)
- In Cold Blood* (Truman Capote) —2
- Indian Killer* (Sherman Alexie)
- In Dubious Battle* (John Steinbeck)
- In Parenthesis* (David Jones)
- Invisible Man* (Ralph Ellison) —26
- The Iron Heel* (Jack London)
- Jazz* (Toni Morrison)
- The Jewel in the Crown* (Paul Scott)
- Jingo* (Terry Pratchett)
- John Dollar* (Marianne Wiggins)
- The Joy Luck Club* (Amy Tan) —5
- Jubilee* (Margaret Walker) —2
- Kate Vaiden* (Reynolds Price)
- The Kid from Tomkinsoville* (John R. Tunis)
- The Killer inside Me* (John Thompson)
- Kindred* (Octavia Butler)
- The Kitchen God's Wife* (Amy Tan)
- Lady Chatterley's Lover* (D. H. Lawrence) —2
- The Left Hand of Darkness* (Ursula K. LeGuin) —3
- A Lesson before Dying* (Ernest J. Gaines)
- Light in August* (William Faulkner) —10
- Little, Big* (John Crowley)
- Little Big Man* (Thomas Berger)
- Lives of Girls and Women* (Alice Munro)
- Lolita* (Vladimir Nabokov) —8
- Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (Sherman Alexie)
- Lonesome Dove* (Larry McMurtry) —2
- Look Homeward Angel* (Thomas Wolfe)
- Lord of the Flies* (William Golding) —4
- Lord Jim* (Joseph Conrad) —2
- The Lord of the Rings* (J. R. R. Tolkien)
- Losing Battle* (Eudora Welty)
- Lost in the Fun House* (John Barth)
- A Lost Lady* (Willa Cather)
- The Loved One* (Evelyn Waugh)
- Love Medicine* (Louise Erdrich) —6
- Lucky Jim* (Kingsley Amis)
- Lud-in-the-Mist* (Hope Mirreles)
- Main Street* (Sinclair Lewis) —2
- Make Way for Lucia* (E. F. Benson)
- The Making of Americans* (Gertrude Stein)
- The Maltese Falcon* (Dashiell Hammett)
- Mama Day* (Gloria Naylor) —4
- The Man in the High Castle* (Philip K. Dick)
- The Man Who Lived Underground* (Wright)
- The Man Who Loved Children* (Christina Stead)
- Martha Guest* (Doris Lessing)
- Mason & Dixon* (Thomas Pynchon)
- Maud Martha* (Gwendolyn Brooks)
- Mean Spirit* (Linda Hogan)
- Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (Siegfried Sassoon)
- Meridian* (Alice Walker) —2
- Middle Passage* (Charles Johnson) —2
- Midnight's Children* (Salman Rushdie) —3
- The Milagro Beanfield War* (John Nichols)
- Miss Lonelyhearts* (Nathanael West)
- Molloy* (Samuel Beckett)
- The Mosquito Coast* (Paul Theroux) —2
- The Moviegoer* (Walker Percy)
- Mrs. Dalloway* (Virginia Woolf) —9
- Mumbo Jumbo* (Ishmael Reed)
- My Ántonia* (Willa Cather) —10
- The Naked and the Dead* (Norman Mailer)
- Native Son* (Richard Wright) —16
- Neuromancer* (William Gibson)
- Murphy* (Samuel Beckett)
- Nights at the Circus* (Angela Carter)
- Nightwood* (Djuna Barnes) — 3
- 1984* (George Orwell) — 11
- Ninety-Two in the Shade* (Thomas McGuane)
- No-No Boy* (John Okada)
- Nostromo* (Joseph Conrad) — 4
- The Novel* (James Michener)
- Offshore* (Penelope Fitzgerald)
- Of Love and Dust* (Ernest J. Gaines)
- The Old Man and the Sea* (Ernest Hemingway) —4
- One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Ken Kesey)
- 5
- One of Ours* (Willa Cather)
- On the Road* (Jack Kerouac) —6
- Operation Shylock* (Philip Roth)
- O Pioneers!* (Willa Cather) —3
- The Optimist's Daughter* (Eudora Welty) —2
- Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (Jeanette Winterson)
- Orlando* (Virginia Woolf) —2
- The Outsider* (Richard Wright)
- Oxherding Tale* (Charles Johnson)
- Pale Fire* (Vladimir Nabokov) —6
- Pale Horse, Pale Rider* (Katherine Anne Porter)
- Parade's End* (Ford Madox Ford)
- A Passage to India* (E. M. Forster) —8
- Passing* (Nella Larsen) —2
- Pilgrimage* (Dorothy Richardson)
- Pincher Martin* (William Golding)
- Player Piano* (Kurt Vonnegut)
- Play It As It Lays* (Joan Didion)
- The Plumed Serpent* (D. H. Lawrence)
- Portnoy's Complaint* (Philip Roth) —2
- A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (James Joyce) —9
- Possession* (A. S. Byatt) —3
- The Power and the Glory* (Graham Greene) —2
- Praise Song for the Widow* (Paule Marshall) —3
- The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Muriel Spark) —3
- Prince of Tides* (Pat Conroy)
- The Professor's House* (Willa Cather) —3
- Quicksand* (Nella Larsen) — 2
- Rabbit at Rest* (John Updike)
- Rabbit Run* (John Updike) —6
- Ragtime* (E. L. Doctorow) —2
- The Rainbow* (D. H. Lawrence)
- Raintree County* (Ross Lockridge)
- The Raj Quartet* (Paul Scott)
- Red Dragon* (Thomas Harris)
- Regeneration* (Pat Barker)
- The Remains of the Day* (Kazuo Ishiguro)
- Requiem for a Nun* (William Faulkner)
- The Rise of David Lewinsky* (Abraham Cahan)
- The Robber Bride* (Margaret Atwood)
- A Room with a View* (E. M. Forster)
- Roots* (Alex Haley)
- Sanctuary* (William Faulkner)
- Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (Willa Cather)

Ulysses (James Joyce) —17
Under the Volcano (Malcolm Lowry) —3
V (Thomas Pynchon)
The Violent Bear It Away (Flannery O'Connor) —2
Waiting for the Barbarians (J. M. Coetzee)
The Wapshot Chronicle (John Cheever)
The Waterfall (Margaret Drabble)
Waterland (Graham Swift)
Waterlily (Ella Cara Deloria)
The Waves (Virginia Woolf) —2
Weep Not Child (Ngugi Wa Thiong'o)
When Rain Clouds Gather (Bessie Head)
The White Hotel (D. M. Thomas)
White Noise (Don DeLillo) —3
Wicked Pavilion (Dawn Powell)
Wide Sargasso Sea (Jean Rhys)
The Winds of War (Herman Wouk)
Winesburg, Ohio (Sherwood Anderson) —6
The Wings of the Dove (Henry James) —2
Wise Blood (Flannery O'Connor) —6
Wise Children (Angela Carter)
The Woman Warrior (Maxine Hong Kingston) —11
Women in Love (D. H. Lawrence) —6
The World According to Garp (John Irving) —3
Wuthering Heights (Emily Brontë)
Yellow Back Radio Broke Down (Ishmael Reed)
Yonnonddio (Tillie Olsen) —2
The Young Lions (Irwin Shaw)
Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (Robert Pirsig)

Using The Heath Anthology of American Literature in Sophomore Composition

by Randy Accetta

Have you ever had one of those student essays that goes something like this: "Because America was founded on Christianity, we should have prayer in schools?" As a finger in the dam against such rhetorical leaps, I designed a composition course that would interrogate the rhetorical strategies of key early American texts in order to better understand contemporary social and political issues. As I told the students, I had five main goals for them: to acquire expertise in critical reading and analytical writing; to learn strategies for persuasive writing; to become an expert at editing; to take a position on a contemporary social issue important to them; to gain the beginnings of a grounding in early American literature. Volume One of the *Heath Anthology* was our source for early American texts, while the Internet provided contemporary texts.

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Seeking answers to Crèvecoeur's question, "What is an American?" the students read selections from *Handsome Lake*, the Yuchi Creation Myth, Smith, Bradford, Winthrop, Mather, Edwards, Hawthorne, Crèvecoeur, Franklin, Paine, Jefferson, Wheatley, Apess, Haynes, Fuller, Stanton, and Douglass. Students were

required to submit a 1–2 page summary and analysis of each reading. Although by the end of the semester students reported being bored by the continuing summaries, these short assignments prepared them for class discussion and provided them with prewriting material for their four larger essays.

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As often happens when students are first exposed to Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, my students were especially drawn to the contradiction between the idealism of the *Declaration of Independence* and the racism of *Query IX*, in which Jefferson argues for the separation of European and African. One of the most successful assignments was a five-page essay examining the ways that Frederick Douglass constructs his Narrative and 'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?' to prove to a white audience that Africans deserve the same rights and privileges that the Declaration asserts for European Americans. Reading Douglass against Jefferson in this manner allowed the students to move beyond the simple observation that Jefferson was a hypocritical product of his times and provided a historical awareness of one of our national paradoxes.

(continued)

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The final third of the course was devoted to examining the ways contemporary political rhetoric invokes, borrows, steals, and otherwise appropriates the language of the early American texts. I offered a few alternatives for this assignment: students could write an analytic essay on one of several topics, they could write a series of letters modeled after Crèvecoeur's Letters, or they could write a short story. Almost every student wrote what we came to call Crèvecoeurian letters, in which the fictional characters presented their arguments and observations by quoting from actual historical or contemporary texts. Although the open-ended nature caused a bit of early anxiety, the final projects uniformly indicated that the students found valuable and interesting connections between past and present national rhetoric.

For example, during her research one woman found that she was related to an actual historical figure, Sarah Goode. Consequently, her essay begins with a device similar to Hawthorne's Custom House sketch in which a fictional young woman finds old family papers in the attic that reveal her genealogical connection to the witchcraft trials. When she awakens the next day, she is in 1692 Salem and on her way to the witch trials. During the proceedings, which she transcribes and paraphrases from historical texts, she argues against Mather, Hale, and Hawthorne by using quotations and paraphrases from contemporary pagan Web sites.

Another student developed a persuasive exchange of letters between high school friends now at different colleges who argue over the benefits of immigration. One fictional student argues that immigrants should act 'American' or go home, while the other argues for the benefits of a multicultural society. Both characters rely on a variety of sources to support their opinions, and they debate various passages by historical and contemporary authors (such as Paine, Crèvecoeur, James Baldwin, Peter Brimelow, and Richard Rayner). Finally, one student suggests that the other emigrate to Australia, where things are more monocultural—a nice irony.

One of the difficulties of the course was balancing the needs for writing instruction with trying to understand the primary texts...

One of the difficulties of the course was balancing the needs for writing instruction with trying to understand the primary texts—in part because in order to understand the texts, we needed to understand the historical background. A significant amount of class time was thus devoted to simply learning the basics of early contact, the Reformation, Puritanism, and the Federalist period. (In terms of the early contact, I presented excerpts from Bartolomé de las Casas's *The Devastation of the Indies* and *The Vinland Sagas*—both of which provide an excellent introduction to the European presence in the Americas. I think the *Heath Anthology* would be well served by their addition.) Besides addressing questions of immigration and race, I had initially expected to focus on working-class

issues and women's issues, but when we reached such sections in the semester, it seemed wiser to focus on the writing rather than on the cultural critique.

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Finally, I would like to report that everyone was happy with the balance of composition and literature, but the results were a bit mixed. For example, while one student wrote that she learned 'how to condense and sharpen [her] writing,' another student said, 'I wished we had focused on sentence-level writing a little sooner.' However, for the most part, the students seemed to enjoy the combination. As one woman wrote in an evaluation of the course, 'I've learned this semester [that] building into and out of quotes takes a lot more work than I once thought. A quotation should not be left to speak for itself in an essay... [and] I've learned a lot more about early America than I have before. Other classes never expose the other side of the story.'

Randy Accetta is completing his dissertation at the University of Arizona on the implications of using telecourses to teach composition and literature. His interests include the constructions of masculinity in the American West.

Their Own Progress and Prospect: African Americans and l'Exposition Universelle de 1900

by Wilfred D. Samuels

We have thus, it may be seen, an honest, straightforward exhibit of a small nation of people, picturing their life and development without apology or gloss, and above all made by themselves.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, “The American Negro in Paris”

Discussion of Africans and African Americans in Paris during the early decades of the twentieth century generally leads to the French fascination with “primitivism,” manifested, for example, in the Expressionist Movement, specifically the works of Pablo Picasso and Matisse, and also by St. Louis-born Josephine Baker, who took Paris by storm in the *Revue Nègre* and *Folies Bergère*. Whereas Picasso immortalized this allure in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Baker changed forever Parisian theater and revues with her stage personification of the savage through her exotic costumes and dance movements to tom-tom music.¹ This “vogue of the Negro” led French art critic Paul Guillaume to conclude France was experiencing a “new renaissance” at the turn of the twentieth century.²

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However, the French obsession with African culture and the black (Nubian)

body was evident as early as the 1870s in annual world's fairs and specifically in the financially successful ethnographic exhibitions staged in public parks and fairgrounds, sponsored at first by the Jardin d'Acclimatation and later by a government with dreams of a colonial empire in Africa. Through these venues the French gazed at the bodies of black “subjects” in their natural habitat, “going about their daily routine—displaying what life was like in distant lands.”³

Members of the French Anthropological Society, particularly those interested in craniometry, reaped tremendous benefits, as they were able to have, through these exhibitions, a conveniently available laboratory in which to measure not only skull shape and volume—that is, the brain size and intelligence of their black “subjects”—but also all aspects of human anatomy, though not without some limitations, as a society member reveals in his lament that “The only thing we could not do was to examine and measure genital organs. It was not possible to see any lower than the upper part of pubic areas.”⁴

A somewhat different agenda and plan for assessment must have dominated the mind of Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, the Harvard graduate and sociologist, when he traveled to Paris to participate in l'Exposition Universelle de 1900—still considered the greatest of all French exhibitions. The exhibition's motto—“Le bilan du siècle” [The summation of the century]—concisely stated its pivotal objective. Designed in part for an international intellectual elite to display its scholarly and technical knowledge and progress, the exposition of 1900 was, according to Richard D. Mandell, “the last time anyone tried to include all of man's activity in one

display.” Mandell concluded that more than man's creativity was at stake: That last festival of amusement and education, co-operation and competition, chauvinism and internationalism could only be planned during a time that still had faith in optimistic philosophical systems, hopes for social reform, joy in expanding material wealth, and confidence in the moral benefits of art.⁵

... the exposition of 1900 was ...the last time anyone tried to include all of man's activity in one display.

This optimism, particularly the sense that art was morally beneficial, was shared in part by Dr. Du Bois, who was committed to what he called “the higher aims of life.” Despite his pessimistic but prophetic declaration in his now classic collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line,” Du Bois was most encouraged by what for him were the significant contributions of African slaves and their descendants. He maintained: Little of beauty has America given the world save the rude grandeur of God himself stamped on her bosom; the human spirit in this new world has expressed itself in vigor and ingenuity rather than beauty. And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas... it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the *greatest gift of the Negro people*.⁶

(continued)

What greater progress in human civilization to celebrate, Dr. Du Bois declares, than the measurable progress blacks had made, a mere three decades after emancipation, with their now calculable contributions—not only to American culture, but indeed to human culture. He concluded:

It is no new thing for a group of people to accomplish much under the help and guidance of a stronger group.... When, however, the inevitable question arises, What are these guided groups doing for themselves? there is...no more encouraging answer than given by the American Negroes, who [in this exhibit] are shown to be studying, examining, and thinking of their own progress and prospect.⁷

Du Bois's gift and cultural bearers had made this contribution, despite their active and continued quest for freedom in a marginalized world of legal segregation.

Du Bois's gift and cultural bearers had made this contribution, despite their active and continued quest for freedom in a marginalized world of legal segregation. In fact, Dr. Du Bois had traveled to Paris from the American South, a space governed by segregated public facilities.

In response to the French's specific request for a "Negro Section" for the 1900 exhibition, Du Bois mounted the "American Negro Exhibit," a "panorama of progress" that, assembled by him and Thomas Calloway, was housed in the Palace of Social Science. Including musical

compositions, books by African American authors, and the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar, their award-winning display of photographs, books, models, maps, patents, and plans from several black universities, including Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Hampton, and Tuskegee, showed the world African Americans "*studying, examining, and thinking of their own progress, and prospect.*" For Du Bois, this was indeed the best venue not only to announce, record, and celebrate universally the progress African Americans had made, but perhaps more importantly to (re)claim the respectability due them and their culture, which had been forfeited through the pronouncements and leadership of Booker T. Washington and the legalization of jim crowism.

Clearly, with this exhibit Du Bois engages, in words and action, a signifying act of deformation; he refuses, as Houston Baker asserts, the "master's nonsense" (e.g., manifested in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision and such pseudo-scientific activities like those conducted by craniometrists in France's Anthropological Society) to transcend "the veil"—the "barrier of American racial segregation that keeps Afro-Americans always behind the color line"⁸—and celebrate cultural triumph and spirituality that move beyond the physicality and materiality of class and race to a level where the "most beautiful expression of human experience" is found.

Ironically, Du Bois's participation in the exhibition resulted in a collaborative effort between him and the president of Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington, whose program of work, money, adjustment, and submission Du Bois criticized for not only "almost completely...overshadow[ing] the higher aims of life," but also for almost

accepting "the alleged inferiority of the Negro race."⁹ Washington's alma mater, Hampton University, where he remained most influential, was the site and therefore the center of the photographic exhibit, showcasing the "images of stunning clarity and intensity" celebrated by Du Bois and produced by white feminist photographer Frances Benjamin Johnson, whom Hampton's administrators had called on to "provide a complete pictorial record."

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As Jeannene M. Przyblyski correctly points out, the dual identity and narratives of progress and effect of spectacle of the exhibition inevitably "laid the products and peoples of the world at the feet of visitors, not as they were, but as those exhibiting them wished they would be"; consequently, in the resulting "realm of the performative and imaginary"¹⁰ racial differences were registered and, in the case of such exhibits as the Natives of Dahomey with its live "subjects," exoticism was inscribed through its depiction of the noble savage. The result was a "zoo-like exposure" to the gaze of exposition visitors.

The Negro Exhibit, staged by exemplary and dutifully attentive Hampton students, and projected and framed by Johnson's lens, allowed

visitors to learn about African American culture by gazing at these “subjects” crammed in winged framed cabinets in a tiny twelve-by-twelve-foot exhibition, constricted space. Stated differently, one may correctly argue that, as a staged-visual display, Johnson’s photographs exposed Hampton, its students, and African American culture to an appropriating white gaze much like that experienced by the “subjects” of the earlier ethnographic exhibition sponsored by the Jardin d’Acclimatation that included animals and natives.

Above all, this exhibition allowed African Americans to see, (re)appropriate, and (re)present themselves positively.

Although somewhat valid, this argument and view would be myopic, for it would fail to consider and/or validate the other overarching accomplishments of the Negro Exhibit of l’Exposition Universelle de 1900, a time when the Negro was in vogue, as African Americans perceived them. Above all, this exhibition allowed African Americans to see, (re)appropriate, and (re)present themselves positively. In their mind, they were crafting a positive self-representation—a “New Negro,” if you will—in order to turn, as Henry L. Gates Jr. suggests, to overcome and transcend in the new century the prevailing “stereotypes scattered throughout plantation fiction, blackface minstrelsy, vaudeville, racist pseudo-science, and vulgar social Darwinism.” Herein lies the significance of the epigraph with which I began this essay. With his participation, Du Bois insists that we, too, must not come to the exhibition site to gaze (to look) but as

visionaries who “see” graphic significations of African American progress and prospect, rather than stereotypes, at best, or merely another ethnographic exhibition—another sideshow—at worst. Perhaps by making this distinction we, too, will do what Du Bois asks readers to do at the end of “Of Our Spiritual Striving”: stop to listen to the unreconciled “striving in the souls of black folk” and recognize the dogged strength that alone keeps their (black) body from being torn asunder by a relentless appropriating and marginalizing gaze determined to make them “Other.”

Notes

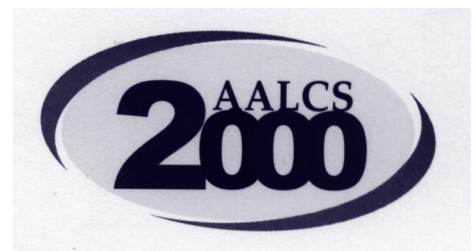
1. See Josephine Baker and Jo Bouillon, Josephine, trans. Mariana Fitzpatrick (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 47–82.
2. See Chidi Ikoné, From Du Bois to Van Vechten: The Early New Negro Literature, 1903–1926 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981), 3–44.
3. William H. Schneider, An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870–1900 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1982), 124–201.
4. Quoted in Schneider, 131.
5. Richard D. Mandell, Paris, 1900 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), xi.
6. W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 178; emphasis added.
7. W. E. B. Du Bois, ‘The American Negro in Paris,’ American Monthly Review of Reviews (November 1900): 577.
8. Houston A. Baker Jr., Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 57; 49–69. Baker distinguishes between the tactics of Booker T. Washington, which he describes as ‘Mastering the Form’ of the (minstrel’s) mask to conceal and disguise his agenda, and Du Bois’s, which he describes as ‘the Deformation of Mastery’ aimed at displaying and advertising rather than concealment.
9. Du Bois, ‘Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,’ The Souls of Black Folk, 30–42. Interestingly enough, Washington emerges as the national leader for African Americans after giving his infamous speech, ‘The Atlanta Exposition Address,’ at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition. Washington successfully argued that the exposition would give former slaves a chance to demonstrate their progress since emancipation. His request was approved and blacks had a separate ‘Negro building’ to house their exhibits.
- See Louis R. Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856–1901 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 204–228.
10. See Jeannene M. Przyblyski, ‘American Visions at the Paris Exposition, 1900: Another Look at Frances Benjamin Johnson’s Hampton Photograph,’ Art Journal (Fall 1998): 65.

Wilfred D. Samuels is associate professor of English and ethnic studies at the University of Utah. He is also the president of the African American Literature and Culture Society of the American Literature Association. He is an Americanist with research interest in twentieth-century American and African American fiction.

The African American Literature and Culture Society of the American Literature Association (AALCS) will host an international conference October 25–October 29, 2000, to assess the development and growth of the African American literary tradition throughout the twentieth century—from the publication of Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* to the publication of Toni Morrison’s *Paradise*.

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For information contact Dr. Samuels at: wilfred.samuels@m.cc.utah.edu or AALCS’s web site: <http://www.atomicage.com/aalcs>. You may phone Dr. Samuels at (801) 581-3288.




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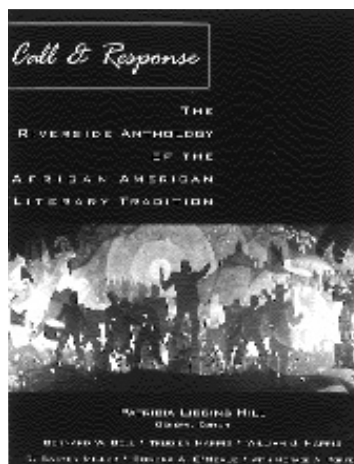
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