

The Project on the History of Black Writing Presents
The Fall 2017 Black Literary Suite

RECLAIMING THE BLACK BODY



NOV 8

NOV 17

NOV 28

Reclaiming the Body
Exhibit and Kick-off
RECEPTION
Kansas Union Gallery

Performing the Body
"The Black Female Body in Pop Culture"
PANEL DISCUSSION
Spencer Museum of Art

Freeing the Body
"The Vision of a Liberated Future"
PANEL DISCUSSION
OMA

4-6PM

3-4PM

3-4PM

KU THE UNIVERSITY OF
KANSAS



EST. 1983



KU SPENCER
MUSEUM OF ART
The University of Kansas

Reclaiming the Black Body: Women Writing Women

An Introduction

The denial of black humanity is one of many consequences of American slavery, a practice that persists even as it changes forms. This is especially true of black women, who are not only pinned under racial and economic oppression, but also gender and sexual oppression. Violence against the black female body in America has a contentious and traumatic history, but despite this abhorrent history, black women have reclaimed ownership over their own bodies as a means of survival, liberation, and self-actualization. Harriet Jacobs is just one example. Plotting her freedom to take back control of her life, Jacobs in her foundational text *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) constructed an important legacy of self-empowerment for black women writers today. This year's Black Literary Suite (BLS) theme "Reclaiming the Black Body: Women Writing Women," seeks to open up a new conversation through works that tell us a different story about agency and self-ownership, about women making and remaking themselves, and about women actively reclaiming their bodies.

We highlight mavericks like Georgia Douglas Johnson whose works depict the unique struggle for a black woman, as the "child of a bitter earth wound," and Ann Petry whose novel *The Street* (1946) was one of the first to examine ways in which black female bodies are subjected to a white and male gaze. Sonia Sanchez's poetry exalts in the beauty of female sexuality in artfully crafted lyrics and bell hooks's foundational writings on feminism also reclaim academic and institutional spaces for the expression of black thought, while Octavia Butler defies space, time, and genre in her novels. Other examples are poet, journalist, and activist Alice Dunbar Nelson, novelist and literary editor Dorothy West, poet June Jordan, and political activist Assata Shakur.

Contemporary writers featured in this exhibit continue this work in new and innovative ways. Suzan-Lori Parks broke ground with *Venus* (1996), reimagining the true story of Sarah Baartman, known as "Venus Hottentot." Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* (2014) examines the stereotyping of black women and their bodies in today's popular culture. Janet Mock creates space for intersectional discussions of black female sexuality in her autobiography *Redefining Realness* (2014) Morgan Parker's *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé* (2017) combines popular culture and narrative introspection to assert identity. Black women writers who address black female agency have also made a global imprint, including novelists Nnedi Okorafor and Yaa Gyasi, essayist Roxane Gay, and poets Warsan Shire and Nayyirah Waheed.

The Fall 2017 Black Literary Suite is an exploration of vulnerability and power, tragedy and rebirth, oppression and agency, censorship and sexuality. This scholarly endeavor celebrates black women's writing as a radical form of liberation, community, and healing.

Thank you for joining the conversation.

The Fall 2017 BLS Team
Anthony D. Boynton and Morgan McComb, co-chairs
Vince Omni and Kyndall Delph

Women Writing Women: Selected Reading

1. Alexander, Elizabeth. *Venus Hottentot*. 1990.
2. Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. 1970.
3. Angelou, Maya. *Just Give Me A Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie*. 1971.
4. Bambara, Toni Cade. *The Black Woman*. 1970.
5. Bambara, Toni Cade. *The Salt Eaters*. 1980.
6. Bonner, Marita. "On Being Young – A Woman – and Colored." 1925.
7. Bonner, Marita. *Frye Street & Environs: The Collected Works*. 1987.
8. Brooks, Gwendolyn. *A Street in Bronzeville*. 1945.
9. Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Annie Allen*. 1949.
10. Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Maud Martha*. 1953.
11. Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. 1979.
12. Butler, Octavia. *Fledgling*. 2005.
13. Christian, Barbara. *Black Women Novelists*. 1980.
14. Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism*. 1985.
15. Cooper, Anna J. *A Voice from the South*. 1892.
16. Davis, Angela. *Women, Race, and Class*. 1981.
17. Davis, Angela. *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. Pantheon, 1998.
18. Davis, Angela. *The Meaning of Freedom*. 2012.
19. Dove, Rita. *Ten Poems*. 1977.
20. Dove, Rita. *Thomas and Beulah*. 1985.
21. Evans, Mari. *I Am a Black Woman*. 1970.
22. Fauset, Jessie Redmon. *Plum Bun*. 1929.
23. Gay, Roxane. *Bad Feminist*. 2014.
24. Gay, Roxane. *Difficult Women*. 2017.
25. Gay, Roxane. *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*. 2017.
26. Giddings, Paula. *When and Where I Enter*. 1984.
27. Giddings, Paula. *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*. 2008.
28. Grimke, Angelina Weld. "The Closing Door." 1919.
29. Grimke, Angelina Weld. "Goldie"; Rachel, 1920.
30. Gyasi, Yaa. *Homegoing*. 2016.
31. hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. 1989.
32. hooks, bell. *Black Looks*. 1992.
33. hooks, bell. *Soul Sister: Women, Friendship, and Fulfillment*. 2007.
34. Hopkins, Pauline Elizabeth. *Hagar's Daughter*. 1901-1902.
35. Hopkins, Pauline Elizabeth. *Winona*. 1902-1903.
36. Hull, Gloria T. *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men*. 1982.
37. Hurston, Zora Neale. "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." 1928.
38. Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. 1937.
39. Hurston, Zora Neale [Walker]. *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing*. 1979.
40. Johnson, Georgia Douglas. *The Heart of a Woman*. 1916.
41. Johnson, Georgia Douglas. *Bronze*. 1922.
42. Johnson, Georgia Douglas. *Plumes*. 1927.
43. Jordan, June. *Who Look at Me*. 1969.
44. Jordan, June. *His Own Where*. 1971.
45. Jordan, June. *Technical Difficulties*. 1992.
46. Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand*. 1928.
47. Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. 1929.
48. Lorde, Audre. *The Black Unicorn*. 1978.
49. Lorde, Audre. *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. 1982.
50. Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider*. 1984.
51. Marshall, Paule. *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. 1959.
52. Mitchell, Angelyn. *The Freedom to Remember*. 2002.
53. Mock, Janet. *Redefining Realnes*. 2014.
54. Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. 1970.
55. Morrison, Toni. *Sula*. 1973.
56. Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. 1987.
57. Naylor, Gloria. *The Women of Brewster Place*. 1982.
58. Naylor, Gloria. *Mama Day*. 1988.
59. Nelson, Alice Dunbar. *Mine Eyes Have Seen*. 1918.
60. Okorafor, Nnedi. *Who Fears Death*. 2010.
61. Parker, Morgan. *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyonce*. 2017.
62. Parks, Suzan-Lori. *Getting Mother's Body*. 2003.
63. Parks, Suzan-Lori. *Venus*. 1997.
64. Petry, Ann. *Miss Muriel and Other Stories*. 1971.
65. Petry, Ann. *The Street*. 1946.
66. Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen*. 2014.
67. Sanchez, Sonia. *I've Been a Woman*. 1978.
68. Sanchez, Sonia. *A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women*. 1974.
69. Sanchez, Sonia. *homegirls & handgrenades*. 1997.
70. Shakur, Assata. *Assata: An Autobiography*. 1987.
71. Shange, Ntozake. *nappy edges*. 1978.
72. Tate, Claudia. *Black Women Writers at Work*. 1985.
73. Tate, Claudia. *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*. 1992.
74. Waheed, Nayyirah. *salt*. 2013.
75. Walker, Alice. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. 1970.
76. Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. 1982.
77. Walker, Margaret. *On Being Black, Female and Free: Essays*. 1997.
78. West, Dorothy. *The Living is Easy*. 1948.

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The Project on the History of Black Writing, founded in 1983, is the oldest self-sustaining research and recovery project in African American literature.

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