

The Black Poets

A New Anthology Edited By
Dudley Randall



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"The claim of The Black Poets to being... an anthology is that it presents the full range of Black-American poetry, from the slave songs to the present day. It is important that folk poetry be included because it is the root and inspiration of later, literary poetry. Not only does this book present the full range of Black poetry, but it presents most poets in depths, and in some cases presents aspects of a poet neglected or overlooked before. Gwendolyn Brooks is represented not only by poems on racial and domestic themes, but is revealed as a writer of superb love lyrics. Turning away from White models and returning to their roots has freed Black poets to create a new poetry. This book records their progress."—from the Introduction by Dudley Randall

The Black Poets Details

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From Reader Review The Black Poets for online ebook

Rowena says

4.5 stars – I wish I could give this book 5 stars; it's a great anthology of black poets including poems from my old favourites, such as Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and James Weldon Johnson, and also introducing me to some "new" poets such as Naomi Madgett, Mari Evans and Claude McKay. The range of poetry is great, and it covers a large period of time. However, I couldn't give it a full rating for a number of reasons. Firstly, I just couldn't get into the folk poetry; the dialect just made reading the poems to be too much of a chore for me (perhaps had I been American, this would not have been the case?). I actually stopped reading the folk poetry after a few pages; I didn't have the patience to read them. Also, some of the poems included were way too radical and explicit for me. Though I do understand that it was necessary due to the tough topics and issues that several of the poems covered, it just isn't my cup of tea.

Speaking of Naomi Madgett, I find the imagery in the following poem wonderful:

Would it please you if I strung my tears
In pearls for you to wear?
Would you like a gift of my hands' endless beating
Against old bars?
This time I can forget my Otherness,
Silence my drums of discontent awhile
And listen to the stars.
Wait in the shadows if you choose.
Stand alert to catch
The thunder and first sprinkle of unrest
Your insufficiency demands,
But you will find no comfort.
I will not feed your hunger with my blood
Nor crown your nakedness
With jewels of my elegant pain.

— Naomi Madgett, The Race Problem

This is a poetry collection I'm proud to have on my bookshelf.

Max says

I thought it was very interesting how the theme was racism. It showed the black perspective on their place in the world. The book explores through song and poetry to show how racism in culture has not changed much at all. In the poem "Dinner Guest; Me," the author describes himself as "the black" problem. This book is good for middle schoolers and above, showing how the world is constantly in problems. People would benefit by rereading this book as they move on in life.

Alex Wildes says

This is a wonderful collection of poetry by some of the country's most well known black poets and some not so well known. It takes the reader thru a time when racism and segregation was the norm, Black Pride was at a all time high and the average person was very politically in touch young and old.

Ken says

This book has been on my bookshelf since just before college and for good reason. The experience of studying poetry in high school would have been transformed if this book were one of its texts.

I flip through the pages over and over again, reviewing old familiars and finding new gems. The collected poems span such a long period that it provides for a literary study of the progression of Black expression in a land both hostile and available.

Reviewing the works of such great writers as Langston Hughes, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Sonia Sanchez, Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti) is priceless. This is required reading for my children and a necessary reference in their transformation into adulthood.

I would recommend this not only for blacks, but anyone truly interested in the beauty of expression that can grow from the collective experience of a people in land.

Angélique (Angel) says

This is one of the greatest collections of poetry I've ever read, because it is more than just a collection of well-written pieces. It is a journey through Black culture in America going all the way from the folk songs of the early slaves to the raw political no-shit-taking poems of writers in the seventies. It shows the assimilation, the rebellion, the adjustment, and the upheaval needed to survive as a poet in a land that would rather you shut up then speak out and write down. It highlights the diversity of Black culture and privileges no one way of living the Black poet life.

It feeds the spirit. Nourishes the mind. Energizes the body. Challenges all. And it calls to question, strikingly, why more of these poets aren't recognized in mainstream academia. Why I had to stumble upon this book in my mom's collection rather than see it at school or in the library. Why these works were never suggested to me when I clung to poetry as a teenager.

This anthology is real and relevant and right on. I'd recommend it to anyone who's ready for a ride.

Sarabi says

I absolutely LOVED this anthology. If i could choose one book to summarize everything I've learned and experienced growing up as a black woman in America, it would be this book. I highly recommend it to any one who is interested in poetry or black art.

Before I started the book, I read a few reviews bemoaning the racial undertones of the poetry, but I took those reviews with a grain of salt for a number of reasons:

- 1) A good portion of recent black history involves race politics.
- 2) The book was originally published in 1971, just after the peak of the Civil Rights Movement in America.
- 3) The book is called the BLACK poets.

I don't know what those other readers were expecting.

That said, the poems in this book are about so much more than race. They covers topics such as religion, family, identity, music, and even poetry itself. Dudley Randall did a fantastic job compiling a wide range poetic styles and choosing poets of diverse backgrounds. I also appreciated his inclusion of folk poetry, which is so often overlooked in poetry anthologies. I usually donate books when I'm done with them because my shelf has limited space, but The Black Poets is definitely a keeper.

Jessica Holter says

The Black Poets: One of my favorite books to study! If you need to familiarize yourself with the work of great poets like Langston Hughes, buy this book. If you want to get to the heart of a Black Man like Etheridge Knight, (You know the brotha you don't want standing behind you at the ATM machine) study this book. If you want to have a great time, running through many black minds form many time periods in american history...The Black Poets has it for you. I refer to this book often, opening it, the way I do my bible, seeking understanding and advise.

Kevin Dufresne says

Hi,

I hope all is progressing well.

The Black Poets is an anthology of Black American poetry edited by Dudley Randall. All-in-all the text is profound. I read so many varying poems by some persons I have never even heard of that are not only potent--but timeless, of which I am very grateful to have come to encounter through The Black Poets.

Onward and Upward,
Kevin Dufresne

Ken Moten says

*"O black and unknown bards of long ago,
How came your lips to touch the sacred fire?
How, in your darkness, did you come to know
The power and beauty of the minstrel's lyre?
Who first from midst his bonds lifted his eyes?
Who first from out the still watch, lone and long,
Feeling the ancient faith of prophets rise
Within his dark-kept soul, burst into song?"* - first stanza of James Weldon Johnson's "O Black and Unknown Bards."

If only I knew how to better praise such a marvelous book! This is the best anthology of poetry I have yet read, and it only goes up to 1971. This book was edited by an African-American poet of the times and it features the best of the best. I earlier reviewed *The Book of American Negro Poetry* which was edited by the man who I quoted above. This collection easily surpasses it. I feel that it does such a good job at showcasing poetry AFTER the Harlem Renaissance (which is where so many like to stop when looking at Black poetry) that I was stunned at how much better it was overall.

I picked this book up from a thrift store, on the fly, and it is well worn. Despite that, I was able to get very good reads of poets I have become very interested in as of late--Robert Hayden and Gwendolyn Brooks. I was also formally introduced to the poetry of Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Dudley Randall, and Lucille Clifton to name a few. The theme of this book reflects the age it was created in as integration gave way to Black social consciousness. I appreciated the inclusion of the anonymous folk verses from slavery though I wish the section on Paul Laurence Dunbar included more of his regular English poems and less of his "dialect" poetry. One thing I learned from this book is that you can tell the difference from actual "dialect" and artistic license (ironically Randall did include Dunbar's poem in which he criticizes people for always choosing his dialect poems over his regular English ones (which he considered superior: *"HE sang of life, serenely sweet, With, now and then, a deeper note. From some high peak, nigh yet remote, He voiced the world's absorbing beat. He sang of love when earth was young, And Love, itself, was in his lays. But ah, the world, it turned to praise A jingle in a broken tongue."*))

How I wish this book was better well-known and well-taught. As much as I like Langston Hughes, African-American poetry was more than just him and Maya Angelou. This book goes along way in showing that.

*"The critics cry unfair
.....yet the poem is born.
Some black emancipated baby
.....will scratch his head
wondering why you felt compelled
.....to say whatever you said.*

*A black poet must bear in mind
.....the misery.
The color-seekers fear poems
.....they can't buy for a ten-dollar
bill or with some clever contract.
.....Some black kid is bound to read you.*

*A black poet must remember the horrors.
.....The good jobs can't last forever.
It shall come to pass that the fury
.....of a token revolution will fade
into the bank accounts of countless blacks
.....and freedom-loving whites.*

*The brilliant novels shall pass
.....into the archives of a 'keep cool
we've done enough for you' generation:
.....the movement organizations already
await their monthly checks from Downtown
.....and*

*only the forgotten wails of a few black
.....poets and artists
shall survive the then of then,
.....the now of now. - In Defense of Black Poets.*

Quanda says

I enjoyed this book in many ways. The fact that the poems were written in a time where being black seemed to be only a place of sorrow, pain, endurance and perseverance, they still found the courage to wake up everyday and treat it as normal (because it was... for them) but amazingly they discovered humor humor too.

We change era's, caliber's of people change and whether simple or highly intellectual this book proved that profoundness can be in everything. This book is in my collection to keep and not only to enjoy people's thoughts back then, but to see how far we've come. Their worries, their dreams and all are not really like ours today... though we still struggle; It's a different kind of struggle, humor and all. You will see the beauty!

Until...

Caitlin says

I quite enjoyed this collection, there was a satisfying array of work, including folk songs and spirituals. Not everything was my cup of tea, and some of these works are definitely a product of their time, but I think they help illustrate political and cultural climate, which is quite interesting.

Britt says

I appreciated that this book of poetry was a glimpse at the heart of the black community. I was moved by the voice of raw honesty, confusion, rebellion, and pride that came forth from this text that Randall compiled. I also like that this highlighted poetry from various periods in African-American History. Very insightful.

"Quadroom mermaids, Afro angels, black saints
balanced upon the switchblade of that air
and sang." - Robert Hayden (A Ballad of Remembrance)

Valerie says

I enjoyed the structure of the book and how it deliberately pulled pieces from the same periods to craft the story of Black poetry. I also appreciated the wide range of work and poets featured, some familiar and many not. Spanning multiple perspectives over decades of time made for an introspective read and reframed my understanding of poetry from the perspective of Black women and men.

Valerie says

This is an excellent anthology. It begins with a section of "Folk Poetry" (broken into "Folk Seculars" and "Spirituals"), then moves to Literary Poetry (broken into "The Forerunners," "Harlem Renaissance," "Post-Renaissance," and "The Nineteen Sixties"). Within these time periods, Randall has selected poets representing a variety of styles, and the poems he has chosen often showcase multiple sides of the same poet. There were many poets I knew included in the anthology, but also many I was unfamiliar with and glad to meet. Unsurprisingly, many of the poems are harrowing and heartbreaking—the pain in some of these left me breathless—but there is beauty and unflinching strength woven through it all, as well. Nothing illustrates this better than these passages from Robert Hayden's "Middle Passage," which never fails to leave me stunned:

Jesus Estrella, Esperanza, Mercy:

Sails flashing to the wind like weapons,
sharks following the moans the fever and the dying;
horror the corposant and compass rose.

Middle Passage:

Voyage through death
To life upon these shores

...

Shuttles in the rocking loom of history,
The dark ships move, the dark ships move,
Their bright ironical names
Like jests of kindness on a murderer's mouth...

Or this from "Kitchenette Building" by Gwendolyn Brooks:

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
Grayed in, and gray. "Dream" makes a giddy sound, not strong
Like "rent," "feeding a wife," "satisfying a man."

But could a dream send up through onion fumes
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall,
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms...

Or this from "I Know I'm Not Sufficiently Obscure" by Ray Durem:

I know I'm not sufficiently obscure
to please the critics--nor devious enough.
Imagery escapes me.
I cannot find those mild and gracious words
to clothe the carnage.
Blood is blood and murder's murder.
What's a lavender word for lynch?

There are so many other fantastic voices in here I could highlight. My only criticism of the book is that I would have liked to see more space devoted to the literary poetry and less to the folk poetry. Having some folk poetry definitely enriched the collection and illuminated some of the roots of the later poems, but after I read a few of the folk poems, the rest felt repetitive, while each poem in the literary poetry section felt unique. That may just be my personal taste, though. Overall, this is a fantastic selection.

Delia Marrero says

This is where I first read a poem by Langston Hughes. I love this collection.
