Chapter Three

Black Literature and the Islam Experience

**Black American Literature: An Overview**

An overview of the black American literature is an essential effort before one attempts to evaluate the impact of the nationalist tendencies and the Islam experience of the middle decades of the century on it. The predicament suffered by the black people in America, over the years, since their arrival in the continent, has in all stages had its indelible stamp on their writings too. Houston A. Baker Jr. points out:

...just as the black American is _ perhaps to a greater extent than any other American _ a social product, so the literature of the black American is _ perhaps to a greater extent than any other body of literature _ most fully understood in terms of a socio historical frame work. (2)

As a matter of fact, one could notice that no black American literature of merit existed before the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The diverse factors pertaining to slavery and the deplorable conditions of slave-life were obviously the reasons for the dearth. It remains a fact that the man legally set apart by black codes, the man defined by his environment as three-fifths of a man, the man forced to work entirely for the profit of others from sunrise to sunset hardly had time to turn his attention to the conscious creation of works of art.
Although literary works of merit were not known to have existed in the early period, there still had "black and unknown bards" who, due to their unique circumstances, were able to produce works of literature. Phillis Wheatley, whose *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* appeared in 1773, and Jupiter Hammon, the slave who was known for his pious poems, are the earliest examples of this kind. George Moses Horton who wrote love lyrics for the students of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and James M. Whitefield are among the noted black writers of the early nineteenth century. The works of these early writers, however, have been observed to be of little literary value. They evince poor craftsmanship and servile imitation of accepted models in both theme and content. Besides, they failed to honestly reflect the experience of the black man in America. They merely emulated their models and did not portray the actual misery, pains and fears of the suffering humanity. They lacked the stuff of which great literature is made.

The experiences of the majority of black Americans, however, get reflected with honesty and originality in another body of black expression consisting of the black work songs, ballads, folk rhymes, folk tales and pre-eminently the black spirituals. In this body of expression the humour, aspirations, pathos and tragedy that characterized the early life of the black people in America are genuinely reflected. The black man's protest against slavery finds proper expression in spirituals which are also characterized by the hope for a better life in another world beyond this temporal existence. The black folk expression, with original forms and the stuff of great literature, is an accurate reflection of the conditions surrounding the life of the black people in America.
It was towards the end of the nineteenth century that the two streams of black expression — conscious literary expression and folk expression — began drawing together. Till then they followed two different courses. Frederick Douglas's *Narrative*, often described a "conscious literary autobiography," Charles Chestnutt's short stories with the black American folk experience as their themes, and Lawrence Dunbar's poems which won him the title of the first black American poet of distinction could be found to effect a blending of the two parallel streams and to impart a seriousness and grandeur to the literature of the Blacks. However, these black authors too were surrounded by difficulty: they were victims of cultural and psychological dualism. Being black, they had the urge to represent honestly the conditions of the black man's life. But there was always the predicament of not being read or accepted. White America at this stage was pronouncedly indifferent to the black man and his literature. Further, the emergence of Booker Taliefero Washington, one of the strongest and most influential leaders of the black society, with his philosophy that the best thing for the black people was hard work, an education in trades and a life of service to the community, helped, at the turn of the nineteenth century, only to reinforce the stereotypes set forth by the Whites. Washington's philosophy was best expressed in one of the classic works of black literature, *Up From Slavery*, published in 1901.

W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* published in 1903, however, was quite different in both content and form. Although Americans at large and black Americans in particular did not respond favourably to Du Bois's forthright and honest work at that time, it was, by
all standards, a prophetic work, a harbinger of things to come. White America then was not ready to hear from a young militant black American that the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of "the color line," nor did America approve of his portrayal of the hypocrisy, hostility and brutality of white America toward black people. The black leadership of the time, under the influence of Booker T. Washington, also accorded no notice to the views of this young militant writer. But the attitude to Du Bois and his outlook changed in a short time and soon he dominated the black intellectual and cultural scenes assertively in the next few decades.

Du Bois's work, both literary and social, exerted such a wave of influence on the young black writers that there was a noticeable growth in the type of attitude which Du Bois projected in *The Souls of Black Folk*. This resulted in a different type of black literature for the first time: literature of great merit, the one characterized by militancy and race pride. James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), his 1917 volume of poetry, *Fifty Years*, and Benjamin Brawley's fine critical work, *The Negro in Literature and Art* (1910), celebrating the multiple achievements of black artists in America, are some of the works written with a sense of race pride in this wake. The influence of Du Bois's militancy in the anti-Washingtonian line only increased in the second decade of the 20th century.

**The Harlem Renaissance of 1920's**

The efforts of the black writers, journalists and scholars with a Du Boisian line of thought coincided with the changed social climate of
America as a whole. The increasing educational opportunities for the Blacks, the migration of black Americans to thriving urban centres and the greater demand for black war workers together led to the genesis of the new class of urban, militant, race-proud black Americans. This phenomenon was at work during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

The black writings of the 1920's evince the high literary manifestation of this awakening. The wide-spread excitement felt in the literary scene of the black community of the time reached its culmination in a movement that has been labelled variously, "the Harlem Renaissance," the "New Negro Movement" and the "Awakening of the Twenties." As all these terms imply, what happened among black Americans in the twenties embodied a rebirth, a bursting forth of the black American spirit. The race-pride, concern for the history of the race, and the militancy resulted from their peculiar living conditions found expression in some of the finest works ever produced by black American writers. Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, Alain Locke and Langston Hughes were the major figures of the movement. They went a long way toward destroying the myth of the "old Negro" and proved decisively that opportunity and race-pride could put black American writers on a par with, if not above, the best of their white contemporaries. The concern with the African past of the black Americans, to an extent, inspired by Du Bois and others, and the concern with the urban black American _ two salient characteristics of the Harlem Renaissance _ didn't altogether go out of vogue and played a significant role in the renaissance of the black cultural and literary fields in the fifties and sixties in the
wake of black nationalism and the Islam experience of the period.

Although the bursting forth of the new black American spirit, the flowering of literary genius represented by the Harlem Renaissance, was destined to be short-lived, the thirties and forties also had certain illustrious black literary figures worth mentioning. Arna Bontemps and Richard Wright had the flowering of their genius during this period. The publication of Sterling Brown's volume of verse, *The Southern Road* (1932), the appearance of his invaluable critical work *The Negro in American Fiction* (1937), Richard Wright's fictional works *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938) depicting the condition of the black American life, violence and oppression, his *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), a factual autobiography and a spiritual record of the black people in America, are landmarks in the black American literature of the period.

Despite his domination of the forties, Wright was not the only black author of merit to come out of that decade. The works of Owen Dodson, Robert Hayden, Melvin Tolson and Gwendolyn Brooks in poetry, and those of James Baldwin, Ann Petry and Ralph Ellison in fiction are noteworthy. Most of these writers were products of the post-war years, and their work is marked by certain characteristics that Richard Wright pointed out in his essay "The Literature of the Negro in the United States." Wright stated that the works of the post-war writers were characterized by "a sharp loss of lyricism, a drastic reduction of the racial content, a rise in preoccupation with urban themes and subject matter both in the novel and the poem" (White... 14).
The Fifties and Early Sixties

The emergence of America as a world leader from World War II necessitated certain drastic changes in the conditions of the black American's life. In order for America to capture the loyalty of the undeclared coloured masses of the world, suddenly stretched between the Communist East and the Democratic West in the wake of the world war, it had to set its racial house in order: therefore, greater opportunities were extended to the black Americans which led to their demanding full citizenship and equality and ultimately their being more obviously Americanized. This had a definite impact on the black American literature also. Houston A.Baker Jr. remarks:

The primary results of the American social revolution in terms of the black American have been an increased diversity, an increased complexity and an increased Americanization. And as the diversity, complexity and Americanization of black America has increased, the literature of the black American has followed suit. In addition, the new reading public that resulted from this stratification, this movement into the mainstream by black Americans, insured black writers the opportunity to deal with their experience honestly and forthrightly. (16)

The novels by Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin and John O Killen were among the prominent works evincing this tendency. This movement into the mainstream was not destined to continue throughout the sixties, for the conditions of the black American's life further deteriorated in the early years of that decade. The more forcefully voiced demands of black
Americans were met in the early sixties by violence on the one hand and with indifference and apathy on the other. Both the philosophies and strategies of the black leaders, naturally, became more militant, and the growth of black nationalism became very rapid. The literature of the black Americans in the subsequent years clearly reflects this movement toward nationalism, militancy and the new religious fervour inspired by the new awareness of racial history.

Late Sixties and Seventies

The literature of the black Americans in the late sixties and early seventies reflects honestly the trends in the socio-political and religious realms of their life. The growing trend toward nationalism, the new awareness of their racial history, the anti-integration outlook, the black Muslim movements and the new convictions etc. together had an indelible effect on the writings of the black Americans of this period. It thoroughly changed the general character of the black American literature and set new values and standards that remained in vogue for many decades.

A sharp turn toward strictly racial themes became one of the foremost characteristics of black literature from Baldwin's Another Country (1963) to the recent works of authors like Amiri Baraka. Once again in black American literature we witness a surge of militancy, race-pride, and pride in the history of the black people like that which characterized the Harlem Renaissance of the twenties. Things African gained a new respect among black Americans along with a growing disaffection with all things American. The new sense of race-pride has
been reflected in modes of speech, dress and action; and the sense of pride in the history of black people has found expression in the demands for books, courses, and mass media programmes that deal justly with the history of the black Americans. There is an essential difference, however, between the literary philosophies of earlier Harlem Renaissance and those of the outpouring of the black American spirit during this period. Houston A. Baker Jr. notes:

The writers of the twenties, as Alain Locke pointed out, were interested in shedding their chrysalises in order to merge into the mainstream of American life. Today's writers, however, are engaged in an attempt to construct a chrysalis of blackness, a distinctive covering which will set them apart and enable them to grasp the essence of the black American's reality. (17)

Just as in the awakening of the twenties the role played by Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois and their movements cannot be denied, the role of Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad and their movements in the new awakening in the black literature of the decades following the sixties also cannot be denied. A careful study of the trends in black literature of the period will, on the other hand, reveal undeniably the fact that almost all characteristic features of the black writings of the period originated from the change in outlook brought about by the black nationalist black Muslim movements. Even the trend of turning to the black folk heritage for inspiration and genuine experience could be viewed in this light.

As a result of the new awareness, the tone of black writings changed to one of pride and militancy. Black writers realized with pride
that blackness was not evil as the Whites had them believe. They further began to speak loudly to their folk about the beauty of blackness and the necessity of resisting white cruelty with loaded guns and loaded words to raise a proud nation of free black people. Houston A. Baker Jr. points out:

The desire to move into the mainstream is seldom expressed, for that movement simply means the obliteration of what is beautiful—a person's blackness and one's accomplished folk heritage. Malcolm X is thus pointed to with pride by black writers. Malcolm refused to be engulfed by the mainstream and its yearnings; he molded standards that were fitting to black lives, and he remained intensely individualistic throughout his life. Malcolm, like so many of the black leaders and writers who have followed in his path, had "soul"—that energy and spirituality that proceed out of a distinctive folk heritage. (308)

Inspired by the new awareness and the spectacular experiences of the heroic life of Malcolm X, the most influential black leader of the time, black critics and black artists discovered the beauty of their heritage and they began to define new standards of excellence. They further reassessed traditional white American cultural products and standards, and finding both the products and standards simply the reflection and projection of "tired white lives," rejected the dictates, products and standards of white American culture altogether. Besides, they turned outward toward an emerging Africa and backward toward their own folk heritage in a search for meaning and value. Black writers of the time further found that a revival, exaltation, understanding and appreciation of
the soul life embodied in the folk heritage was the only way by which a black writer arrive at a firm sense of identity and speak meaningfully to his own people.

Reassessment of the white values and standards, rejection of them as worthless and the revival of the black folk heritage had, in short, been the general characteristic features of black literary activities of these decades. This was obviously the impact of the black nationalist / black Muslim movements that emerged prominently in the life of the black people in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

The Manifest Islam Experience

The new awareness in black literature in the decades following the second World War which C. W. E. Bigsby labelled the Second Black Renaissance, which Larry Neal termed the Black Arts Movement and which many other noted critics identified as the flowering of black cultural nationalism, has been widely discussed by literary critics as well as writers with diverse socio-political interests. Larry Neal, C. W. E. Bigsby and a host of others among the scholarly writers of contemporary America have undertaken extensive studies highlighting the various aspects of this phenomenon. Although the names of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X are often mentioned in such studies, critics and scholars are not seen to be particularly interested in treating the phenomenon in terms of the Islam experience of the black people of the period.

This factor in the revival of black literature has suffered a serious neglect, but it does not appear to have been denied by any significant figure. Therefore, it will be adequate to trace the emergence of the Islam
experience in the Afro-American literature with reference to the major characteristics of the writings of this period before starting the effort to analyse its diverse effects and impacts.

The general trends and characteristics of the post-war black American literature unequivocally yield the fact that this literary awakening was a thorough reflection of the awakening experienced in their socio-political and religious life. As has been pointed out earlier, the most pervasively felt phenomenon in their life during the period was the emergent black nationalism. The search of the black people for their true identity and their struggles for liberation that finally resulted in their unification for an anti-integrationist struggle on the racial or colour line that found its full expression in the black Muslim movements had, in fact, begun in the 1920s with the influential leaders like Noble Drew Ali, Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois. The nationalist Muslim movements of the post-war decades were, by a general consensus, the flowering of the phenomenon that emerged in the twenties. This phenomenon was not very visibly found in the thirties and forties owing to the oppressive governmental policies and the absence of influential leadership. Yet its influence on the cultural life of the Blacks has not been negligible at any stage. The literature of the black Americans in the decades beginning with the 1920s reveals this fact. Although so many other factors could be identified as tributary, the trend towards black nationalism, with a strong awareness of Islam and the African past of the race, was quite central to the changes that took place in the life of the black people.

The Islam experience in Afro-American literature, in fact, cannot
be confined to the post-war decades. This, in fact, was developing in a steady parallel with the Islam experience in the rest of their life. The twenties and the post-war decades were two epochs when the nationalist or Islam trend had widespread upsurge. In the twenties the key figures behind this were W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and others, and in the post-war decades the key figures were Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X and others. The close parallels of this phenomenon in literature were the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the Second Black Renaissance of the sixties and seventies respectively. Both these literary upsurges were characterized by the Islam experience or nationalist trend of the corresponding periods.

The discovery of the African and Islamic roots of the Afro-Americans that finally effected a thorough change in their life has been discussed at length as the Islam experience in the previous chapter. The reflection of this phenomenon in their literature has remained unidentified and to a larger extent deliberately ignored. This serious neglect is felt to be deliberate especially when one understands that the phenomenon was very dominant ever since the black writers began serious creative literary activities. This was so largely because of the fact that their Islam affinity had always been intertwined with their search for identity, their search for racial, cultural and national history. And therefore, Islam had its overt or covert influence on their outlook and activities ever since they began their organized struggles and collective efforts following the abolition of slavery in America.

The Islam-inspired movements of the twenties gave birth to a great awakening in the black people in and around Harlem and created its
indelible effect on the literature of the black people of the time. The cry for equality and integration and the sense of pride and a number of other features that gave the writings of the black people of the twenties the qualities of great literature were, properly viewed, the impact of these movements.

This phenomenon, although continued in a lesser degree in the thirties and forties, had, in fact, become defunct by the late twenties along with the movements that gave birth to it. But in the late fifties and early sixties, it reemerged in a reinforced and widely pervasive way along with the black Muslim movements. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, as Kimberly W. Benston pointed out in Baraka: the Renegade and the Mask, was an early attempt towards the development of the black consciousness in art and literature that fully bloomed in the 1960s' black cultural revival. Kimberly W. Benston further observes:

The unification of political ideology and cultural expression is not a new problem in Afro-American aesthetics. The "Negro Renaissance" of the 1920s, in a radical departure from the standards of past black writers, saw the emergence of the so-called "New Negro"... This artistic development, somewhat naively enthusiastic, manifested itself politically in the "Back to Africa" movement of Marcus Garvey and his followers. As Harold Cruse says, the philosophy of the Garveyites was the first clear and overt articulation of "Negro Nationalism" that engendered a significant following. (50-51)

But the influence of W. E. B. Du Bois on the black writings of the
time had been more palpable and more direct. Houston A. Baker Jr. notes:

... Du Bois's most notable role, however, is as the father of a militant, intellectual, race-conscious brand of black literature that was to find its finest expression in the Harlem Renaissance of the twenties. Du Bois clearly marks a transition from folk expression and slave narratives to conscious literary artistry that reflects a cultural point of view and a proud militancy. (54)

Marcus Garvey who loomed large in the socio-political scene of the twenties and appears to have had a clear Islam connection, also exerted a great deal of influence on the black writers of the period and determined the general character of the Harlem Renaissance of the twenties. Even Countee Cullen who is often accepted as the "poet laureate" of the Harlem Renaissance, is noted to have been influenced by Marcus Garvey and his movement Universal Negro Improvement Association. Houston A. Baker Jr. Observes:

And in "Heritage," Cullen once again gave witness to the fact that a writer cannot escape his fundamental life experiences; the poem is but one expression of the atavistic yearnings for Africa that found their readiest outlet during the twenties in Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. (141)

The surge of militancy, race-pride and pride in the history of the black people and many other characteristics of the black literature in 1950s and 1960s were quite like that of the Harlem Renaissance. The two
movements differed from each other only in magnitude and in the degree of the maturity of the phenomenon.

C. W. E. Bigsby who labelled the awakening in the 60s and 70s "the Second Black Renaissance." commenting on the characteristics of the two literary movements in the black literature observes:

The first Black Renaissance (formerly called the Harlem Renaissance or the Negro Renaissance) can, with some confidence, be confined to the decade beginning in the mid 1920s. It was a brief but powerful explosion of black culture which placed the Negro, for a time, at the heart of a national myth and dramatized a self-image at odds with, that offered by American society as an adequate account of black life. The Second Black Renaissance, as I have chosen to call it, is less easily contained. Admittedly, a case could be made for the special significance of the period from 1964 to the end of the decade, as evidencing the energy of the Black Arts Movement. But for all its distinctiveness, this was part of a development in black writing which had begun with Richard Wright and which had continued throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. (The Second... 3)

Larry Neal's observation in the famous tract The Black Arts Movement, is more revealing and very suggestive in this regard:

The Black Arts movement represents the flowering of a cultural nationalism that has been suppressed since the 1920s. I mean the "Harlem Renaissance" which was essentially a failure. It did not address itself to the
mythology and the life-styles of the black community. It failed to take roots, to link itself concretely to the struggles of that community, to become its voice and spirit. Implicit in the Black Arts Movement is the idea that black people, however dispersed, constitute a nation within the belly of the white America. This is not a new idea. Garvey said it and the Honorable Elijah Muhammad says it now. And it is on this idea that the concept of Black power is predicated. (The Black... 202)

In short, there is a general consensus on the idea that the two movements basically had the same impulses although they had disparities in their manifestations. In his scholarly study of Baraka's career Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask, Kimberly W. Benston states that the Garvey movement was important as a stage in the development of Afro-American nationalist thought. A coherent aesthetic, based on clear harmonization of political theory and artistic inclination, was in no way an achievement of the great Renaissance of the 1920s. Commenting on the failures of the Harlem Renaissance with regards to the awakening in the 60s and 70s Benston further says:

There are several basic reasons for this failure which shed light upon the Black Arts Movement's own achievements. First of all, the Renaissance was in great part limited to a few metropolitan centres, particularly Harlem, and therefore became subject to a peculiar kind of urban provincialism. Only that which met the thematic and ideological standards of New York's entertainment-hungry market place could
expect great attention. By contrast, the Black Arts Movement encompasses every major city (Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles were in fact 'ahead' of New York in the early stages of the movement) and, increasingly much of the south. Secondly, the very idea of a "new" Negro implied a negative view of the immediate past and contributed to the Renaissance's inability to develop a historical consciousness of Afro-American identity. (51-52)

The Islam experience of the Afro-Americans in the sixties and seventies was not anything confined to literature or any particular field. It was, in fact, an awakening that touched all walks of their life with its obvious impact. It was racial, national, political, economical, cultural and literary. It revolutionized the private as well as the public life of the black community. It was, in fact, a tendency to reject everything white—the white culture, values, outlook, aesthetic etc. and to evolve a new and real black identity in all these fields. This tendency for the rejection of white values and the acceptance of genuine black values had its immediate impact on all aspects of their existence. In the religious field, there was the rejection of Christianity, the religion of the Whites and the acceptance of Islam, their ancestral religion, the religion they followed in their African period which imparted dignity, respect and justice to them, as Askia Muhammad Toure, a noted Afro-American writer of this period, observes: "...a solution, a form to replace the sterile, puppet systems of "Negro" thought. That form is Islam. the universal religion or way of life that is spreading across the Third World and inside America today" (142).
In politics, there was the rejection of the white power structure and the cry for black power, for a separate nation for the black people. In the cultural field, in literature and arts particularly, it was the search for a new identity and a desire for self-determination. The desire for self-determination resulted in the formation of a new aesthetic, genuinely black aesthetic, a new mode of writing and a new literary and theatrical movement and in the revival of the African and Afro-American folk art forms. The revolutionary changes in the political and cultural life of the black people are obviously interrelated and sprang from the same source. Larry Neal remarks: "Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the black power concept... The Black Arts and the Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic" (The Black... 187).

Just as the new trends in the socio-political and religious fields of Afro-American life sprang from their search for the past and the discovery of Islam as their genuine religion, so the new tendencies in their literature and arts too owe a great deal to the same factors. Responding to a question about the Islam connection of Black Arts, in an interview with Marvin X and Faruk, Baraka says:

As you begin to beat your way back through the symbols, getting close to the source of what Black Art was, you begin to see that it comes out of Islam. The closeness of man with natural evidence of divinity is what art was about in the beginning, to reveal, to manifest divinity that man can understand: to make marks, to make symbols, to make signs, to make sounds, to make images that reveal Divinity, that
reveal the presence of one Force that animates everything. And that's what art is supposed to be about, to collect that Divinity, to show its existence, to praise it and to damn things that are seemingly trying to throw themselves against it. The artist's words, the signs, the symbols, the artifacts are magic things; they're supposed to be able to suggest the presence of Allah (God)... (148)

The new Islam-inspired trends in the cultural fields of the black community were, in fact, the result of the general impact Islam had on the black intelligentsia, the educated black youth of the campuses. The black Muslim leaders, Malcolm X and Elijah Muhammad, had been of inestimable influence on them in the process of their transformation. In a short essay entitled "The Crisis in Black Culture," Askia Muhammad Toure reveals this fact:

Where will this Black Intelligentsia come from? The New Black Intelligentsia is emerging today from independent radicals, the campuses _ especially the new Black Student Unions that are in formation _ and from those youth from the streets who've been awakened and influenced by Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and the young Black Power advocates. (35)

Many noteworthy figures in the black cultural field, thus, became their followers and joined the black Muslim movement. The number of those who joined them was quite huge. Equally huge was the number of those who, though they didn't follow their path, were transformed in their outlook and attitudes. As a result, Malcolm and the new outlook
propagated by him became an important motif in the black literature of the time. Kimberly W. Benston sheds light on this matter:

If the influence of Malcolm X among ghetto blacks was considerable, among young black artists it has been of mythic proportions. Countless poems, plays and stories have elegized his leadership, reflected his intense commitment, repeated his philosophy and interpreted his legendary achievement. What is important to realize is that for these artists Malcolm X is not merely a man and heroic martyr. More exactly, he is the symbolic representative of the nationalistic themes and approach to life's chaos which he avowed. (27)

The black writers and artists who revolutionized the Afro-American cultural field in the wake of the revolutionary black nationalist trends in the sixties and seventies had a genuine outlook and a philosophy of certainty. Though a little late to appear in the scene, it was Le Roi Jones / Amiri Baraka who was destined to become the greatest spokesman or champion of this movement. In the preface to Le Roi Jones / Amiri Baraka Reader, Baraka talks about the direction of the Black writers of the time:

When we declared the need for:

1. An art that is recognizably Afro-American

2. An art that is mass oriented that will come out the libraries and stomp

3. An art that is revolutionary, that will be with Malcolm X and Rob Williams that will conk Klansmen and erase racists
we meant this not only with the fervour and new fire of youth, but with the certainty and necessity of our realest history. (xii)

Malcolm X and his movement had attracted every one of the black writers that even those who till then were involved themselves in the slavish emulation of the white standards in their effort to attract the recognition of the white critical world were now compelled to turn their attention from the mainstream: white literary world to the heroic leader. They were persuaded to discard the white values, life-style, philosophy, outlook and the white aesthetic, and were urged to seek their own genuine identity and legacy in all these fields. In the socio-historical field, there was Alex Haley who wrote *Roots*, the greatest classic of black literature to search out and fix the historical, racial and cultural roots of the Afro-American society. In the cultural field, there were Ron Karenga, Askia Muhammad Toure and others; in film, there was Spike Lee and in the literary and theatrical field, there was the trend-setting presence of Le Roi Jones who immediately after Malcom's death embraced Islam and joined the Muslim group to which Malcolm X belonged.

It is true that the greatest figure among the black intellectuals who effected a landslide change in the cultural field of the black community under the influence of Malcolm X and his movement was Le Roi Jones. But he was not alone in the scene, nor was he the first to appear. Kimberly W. Benston observes:

Le Roi Jones is commonly thought to be the founder or father of the revolution in Black Art. The truth is that while Jones was still toiling in the wasteland of America's
mainstream avant-garde, several black innovators were already sowing the seeds that later sprouted as the Black Arts Movement. Such figures as Askia Muhammad Toure (formerly Roland Snellings), Daniel H. Watts, Bobb Hamilton, and Hoyt Fuller were actively working toward a nationalist aesthetic in the early 1960s. (42)

Political journals such as Freedomways, Liberator and Black America, and small literary magazines including Umbra, Soul Book, The Journal of Black Poetry, Black Dialogue, and Negro Digest were publishing straightforwardly revolutionary articles, poems and theoretical manifestos several years in advance of Jones's full entry into black letters. While Malcolm X was making speeches and dozens of other black artists were formally working toward a black aesthetic, Jones was editing "beat" poetry magazines in Greenwich village (Floating Bear and Yugen) and working primarily with white writers such as Charles Olson and Robert Creeley.

Thus by the late sixties, the black writers and artists had revolutionized themselves a great deal drawing inspiration from the development in the political and religious fields where the image of Malcolm X was dominant. They referred to Malcolm so often because his name immediately evoked the principles of the black nation they sought to build. This, however, was never confined to the use of Malcolm's name. Use of Malcolm's name and memory were relatively minor weapons in the poetic arsenal of the black revolutionary writers. More prevalent, more noteworthy, and indeed more revolutionary, was the
remarkable creative ferment which the young nationalistic artists had initiated, a development of aesthetic consciousness, stylistically, thematically and spiritually akin to Malcolm's contribution.