CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

W.E.B. Du Bois, the prophet and architect of the African American Renaissance of the 1920s in his seminal work, *Souls of the Black Folks* foretold in 1903,

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War and however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, the question of Negro slavery was a real cause of the conflict (16).

Ever since the term autobiography has been identified as a genre by Robert Southey in the early nineteenth century, it lends itself to various shades of meaning. Candace Lang casually and sarcastically has made a remark, “Autobiography is indeed everywhere one cares to find” (Anderson, 1). A work of art is created only as an exteriorization of an author’s self. This is why one makes an attempt to probe the autobiographical element in Charles Lamb, Jane Austen or any other writer. But autobiography is a written document of the life of a person written by that person. Usually, it is based on the writer’s memory and it is a form of memoir. In 1982, Lejeune defines the limitations of an autobiography as follows: “A retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (Anderson, 2). Laura Marcus, a recent critic of autobiography highlighted the concept of intentionality of the author. In the meanwhile Jame
Olney aptly remarks “definition of autobiography as literary genre seems to me virtually impossible” (Anderson, 5).

The genre of autobiography lives in the two worlds of history and literary, objective fact and subjective awareness. As Stephen Butterfield rightly observes, “It is dialectic between what you wish to become and what society has determined you are” (1). In response to a particular historical period the autobiographer examines, interprets and creates the importance of his life. He may also affect history by leaving the work behind as a model for other lives. Autobiography asserts, therefore that human life has or can be made to have meaning, that one’s action counts for something worth being remembered, that one is a conscious agent of time, that one not only drifts on the current of one’s circumstances but one fishes in the stream and changes the direction of its flow.

Any good autobiography does two things for the reader: affirms his potential worth, and calls his realization of that worth into question by telling a true story of someone who has travelled a different path. Black autobiography does these two things for our whole civilization. Black writers offer a model of the self which is different from white models, created in response to a different perception of history and revealing divergent, often completely opposite meanings to human actions. These meanings are accessible to western man, because they are moulded and articulated in response to his society, framed and to a certain extent distorted by his language and culture. They challenge us to consider, among other things, whether a judge has any rights which a defendant is bound to respect.

The concept of identity that dominates most well known white personal narratives since the Renaissance is the individual forging a career, a reputation, a business, or a family out of the raw material of his neighbours. Other people are rungs on the ladder of his success or reflections of his greatness. If he makes it to the top, his story, like Benjamin Franklin’s is a kind of manual of how to achieve
power, wealth and fame; or, like Norman Mailer’s and Benvenuto Cellini’s continual affirmation of how much he deserves them. The spiritual journals of white mystics, such as George Fox and Thomas Merton are exceptions to this rule. White autobiography since the nineteenth century, notably in the Diary of Anais Nin, the journals of Baudelaire, De Quincey’s *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, and to a lesser extent the Education of Henry Adams, tends to depict the self as a rebel, an isolated maverick at odds with the direction of his society. Although he may not consume his fellow men as objects to reinforce his ego, he is still driven back on the subjective resources that sustain him as an individual. It is assumed that the white West is at crossroads and that one must learn to love each other or die, to discover and respect one’s neighbour, to create mass movements that will dismantle or totally remake all the institutions of society designed for purely private interest groups, and to break the hold of the few resources desperately needed by the many. At such a time, the western private self comes to be felt as a hardening skin that must be split and shed.

Applying all the conventional tools to define the genre of autobiography will become superfluous if one tries to explain the hypothesis of African American Autobiographies. They use only the nomenclature and from there they take a shift towards their hidden agenda that is, using art for propaganda. As the aim of African American autobiographers differs from the traditional first person narrative dealing with personal experience or the study based on gender differences or study advocated by great stalwarts like Freud, Lacan and Derrida may be of little use. Before making an attempt to shed light on African American Autobiographies, it will be relevant to have a look at Julia Swindells observation on the new uses of autobiography:

"Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness — women, black people, working-"
class people — have more than begun to insert themselves into the culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a ‘personal’ voice which speaks beyond itself. (Anderson, 104)

One comes to understand that this genre has become the text of the oppressed. Here the autobiography speaks about one person’s experience and his experience represents a particular marginalized group. Thus, “the autobiography becomes both a way of testifying to oppression and empowering the subject through their cultural inscription and recognition” (Anderson, 104). She further argues that the autobiographical self “may include fictional once” (Anderson, 104). Stephen Butterfield reiterates that autobiography is “one of the ways that black Americans have asserted their right to live and grow” (2-3).

The ‘self’ of African American autobiography, on the whole, taking into account the effect of western culture on the African American is not an individual with a private career, but a soldier along historic march toward Canaan. The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group, with ties and responsibilities to the other members. It is a conscious political identity, drawing sustenance from the past experience of the group, giving back the iron of its endurance fashioned into armor and weapons for the use of the next generation of fighters. The autobiographical form is one of the ways that African Americans have used to assert their rights to live and grow. It is a bid for freedom, a beak of hope cracking the shell of slavery and exploitation. It is also an attempt to communicate to the white world what whites have done to them. The appeal of African American autobiographies is in their political awareness, their empathy for suffering, their knowledge of oppression and discovery of ways to cope with that experience and their sense of shared life, shared triumph, and communal responsibility. The self belongs to the people and the people find a voice in the self.
No other quote can explain full well what the genesis of an African American autobiography is than the critique advocated by Stephen Butterfield in the introduction to his *Black Autobiography in America*:

George Orwell’s image of the future in *1984* was of a boot stamping on a human face forever. He could have used the same image to represent the Negro past in America, fitting the boot easily to the foot of slave-trader, overseer, master, policeman, soldier, capitalist and politician. But a full portrait of this image drains the terror from his warning; for if the future is to resemble the past at all, then the human face will triumph over the boot. This is the message, the total subjective impression, of African American autobiographical writing. In black autobiography, the wounds on the human face heal to defiant scars; the eyes take on the glint of pride and awareness; the mouth sets in determination; the humanity blooms under the pressure of the boot into a fierce flower, whose blossom tells us that until people are altogether emptied of every quality which distinguishes them from mere implements, there will always be a limit to how many times the foot can strike before it is left behind by a bloody stump (2).

There are white American writers who have broken the bonds of Renaissance individualism, who have realized that the concept of the isolate self oppresses them too and who have achieved a more meaningful humanity in personal narrative. In early colonial journals, in the writings of William Bradford and Cotton Mather, the personal voice is animated by social mission and the dream of the New Jerusalem. But in African Americans autobiography, the unity of the personal and the mass voice remains a dominant tradition. It was never torn apart by the engine of industrialism, or starved by the long and persistent practice,
legalized, institutionalized and sanctified, of stealing land and converting other people’s lives into capital. Resistance to the enslaver’s boot forced it to grow strong and supple.

African American autobiographies are also a mirror of white deeds. They fill in many of the blanks of America’s self knowledge. They help one to see what has been left out of the picture of national life by white writers and critics, how one’s critical judgments have been limited, indeed, crippled by a blind spot toward African American culture. Most importantly, they are an inspiration and a conscience. To read closely what they have to say, to allow their message entry into the bloodstream and vital nerve centers, is to look at the monster of slavery and racism full in the face, to confront it nakedly, without the shield of interpretation by white historians. Knowledge of the sins of the fathers is terrible burden for the children of pirates, murderers, kidnappers and rapists, for the children of those who received the benefits of stolen labor and genocide and closed their eyes, perhaps with a humanitarian shudder to its effects. These children must somehow find a way to cast off the father’s legacy of evil if they dare to dream of a New Land for themselves. The price of ignoring it is to smother the intelligence, with all the consequences this reaction implies like to become divorced from one’s humanity, to reduce oneself to a thing, a consumer machine for generating or appropriating surplus value, an obstacle to the growth of others. But, as so many African American autobiographies demonstrate, one is never required to remain a thing. The humanity won by the slave and his descendants belongs to humanity in general. The door of the white prison is opened, not closed, by his story. If the very worst effects of oppression have been unable to wipe out intelligence, compassion, honour, faith, hope and the courage to resist in the mass of its African American victims, then these qualities are preserved for all, including the children of the ruling culture. The slave’s victory is the victory of the best for everyone.
The present work is an exploration of African American autobiographical writing in America from the 1830s to 1960s. The following are the best sellers among the African American autobiographies, Malcolm X’s *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* (1945), Barack Obama’s *Dream from the father* (1995) and Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968). More than ninety autobiographies were published by African Americans between 1865 and 1930. Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery* (1901) was a trend setter and the slave narratives from 1865 find an epitome in this book. W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of the Black Folks* and Marcus Garvey’s New Negro Renaissance movement catapulted their struggle for emancipation.

The main purpose is to read the books closely, to evaluate their importance, to trace the development of the genre over a period of time, to discuss the books as embodiments of the African American experience, to relate them wherever possible to the literature of the white mainstream. They focus specifically on the complex relationships between viewpoint, identity, audience, motive, occasion and use of language in each book. It is essential to relate these works to the overall matrix of African American politics, culture and history in order to understand the achievement of the literature. A blend of textual, biographical and sociological critical approaches are used, according to what each work seems to require for the fullest appreciation.

The principle of selection has been to include as many works as possible within the scope of a short study that are powerful in their own right or that reveal an important historical trend. Literary merit has been the chief, but not the only criterion. Figures who made a large impact on African American history are discussed even when their autobiographies have scant appeal as literature. Indeed, the question of literary merit itself is reexamined by the method of discussing works in their social and political context. It is argued that the context of a work, especially the values of the author, help to determine its merit. Some
autobiographies that would be covered in a comprehensive history have been overlooked here, but enough are included to show the range and depth of the form.

Hundreds of slave narratives that might have been covered, those actually chosen tend to be from among recent reprints. Availability is of course affected by demand in the market place and demand is not necessarily an index of merit. The market for a African American autobiography expands and contracts according to a combination of political circumstances. Demand is built into American society by the fact that the African American writing comes from a minority group and has a special story to tell. But the market can be neutralized precisely because the special nature of the story threatens those who benefit from racist institutions. Major publishers usually have shown interest in African American stories only when race became a national issue and the political struggle of African American people could not be ignored. The autobiographies tend to be clustered around such periods as the 1840s and 50s, during the height of the Abolitionist Movement— the 1920s and ‘30s during the Harlem Renaissance, the organization of the CIO, and the zenith of the Communist Party or the 1960s and ‘70s during the great urban rebellions and the emergence of Black Power.

Even when social unrest creates the demand, however, political decisions determine which books will go into market and which ones will go into the rejection basket. Other factors being equal, a company’s decision to popularize, say, Yes I Can by Sammy Davis Jr., and reject Here I Stand by Paul Robeson, has little to do with either demand or merit. A critic has no choice, therefore, but to rely on his own biases, unless he wants to rely on the biases of others. Accordingly, one can examine several books that are generally neglected but that contribute much to the genre and to the understanding of American history.

The particular bias behind this study is evident in the treatment of the material. Revolutionary narratives are considered more worthwhile than middle
class success stories, not merely because they are revolutionary, but also because they are usually better written and their insight is more profound. In any case, it would not be possible to deal with African American autobiography as a sequence of loyal accolades to free enterprise. The main burden of the African American writer, regardless of his class origins, has been to repair the damage inflicted on him by white racism, rend the veil of white definitions that misrepresent him to himself and the world, create a new identity and turn the light of knowledge on the system that holds him down. It takes a certain kind of bias to appreciate such light.

In dealing with some African American autobiographies, particularly in the period of slavery, one must take into consideration the hand of the white ghost writer. A large portion of the slave narratives were directed or actually written by whites, such as, the original Confessions of Nat Turner, Mattie Griffiths’ Autobiography of a Female Slave and Solomon Northup’s Twelve Years a Slave. The works included here are primarily those subscribed written by himself or written by his own hand after the name of the author. It is also often difficult, and indeed unimportant, to distinguish between the two categories, due to the fact that the slave narrators generally imitated the popular styles of their time even when they had no assistance. When one takes up the Autobiography of Malcolm X, which was set down by Alex Haley, one has only to consult Malcolm’s speeches to see that it contains his authentic voice in the writing.

The material is divided into three time periods that correspond roughly to stages in the evolution of African American political and cultural expression. The slavery period focuses primarily on the last two decades before the Civil War, when the slave narratives came to full maturity and most of their authors were taking prominent roles in the anti-slavery crusade. The works that fall between 1900 and 1961, the great age of Du Bois and Wright, are covered in a single section. Although it is recognized that this span is a more complex and variegated epoch, the autobiographies do have several features in common which distinguish them as belonging to another period. They are more literary and introspective, the
styles are sharply individualized and the identity more alienated, not only from white Americans, but from other African Americans. After 1961, the form shows a resurgence of political purpose and a trend toward more colloquial language.

Many characteristic black modes of thought, feeling and expression run through all periods almost unchanged. Taken together, they lend the work a quality of energy, a striving to overcome an inward contradiction that is perhaps best described as the tension of reclaiming the human face from the distorted shape of the mask. This tension propels the best works with an incandescent power.

Both White and Black literature in the United States of America began with autobiographical accounts, but the African American accounts had something that was not present in the colonial journals. They were instruments of struggle against a hostile class power. This fact affects the whole tradition of African American literature. The African American writing of the period between 1901 and 1961 is marked by deep alienation and identity crisis. When the African Americans migrated to the Northern cities, they were absorbed into industries as unskilled workers. They were terrorized whenever they tried to exercise the freedoms the law had provided them. At the same time, the migration to the urban North increased the possibilities for cultural and political action. The Harlem Renaissance and the Universal Negro Improvement Association followed closely on the growth of an African American ghetto in New York.

Their politics ranges from acceptance of segregation to proclamation of integration. Every writer of the period is driven to assert the fact of his Blackness as the starting point of creating a free self. They assault the racism of American institutions. In doing so, these authors fall back on the same values that sustained the slave narratives — education, work, restless movement, resistance, group loyalty. Religion is a much weaker influence, but Christian assumptions are deeply ingrained in the rhetoric of major figures. The assertion of Black identity means
that the author takes pride in being Black. It also means that he must maintain and
struggle to reconcile two contradictory identities: one as a Black person, the other
as an American. If he identifies with his own Black people to the exclusion of
White America, then he becomes alien to his own homeland. If he identifies with
the values of White America, then he is in danger of cutting himself off from his
African American cultural heritage. The pressures of double identity have been
expressed in the slave narratives.

The autobiographies of Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Zora Neale
Hurston, the subject authors, belong to the second phase of African American
writing. These writers face a new dilemma in addition to the old one of double
identity. As the individual author succeeds in the white world by virtue of his
outstanding abilities, he is more and more removed from the Black Masses. The
gap increases between himself and his own people and at the same time he can
never wholly enter the white American mainstream because of his colour. He feels
alienated from both worlds. Its effect is that it compels him to reexamine and
redefine the whole relationship of the African American writer to his own people
and political movements. He must articulate not only what it means to be an
African American, but also what it means to be a writer of their color and political
activist and on what basis art and politics are to be reconciled. The divided self
mirrors the divisions in the society at large. He cannot harmonize the self without
becoming deeply involved in depicting its relations with other selves.

What makes autobiography especially an attractive form to the African
American writer is that it lives in the two worlds of history and literary. They have
two equally important perspectives which must somehow be brought together into
a single field of vision — the subjective awareness and the political message, the
unfolding sense of self and the absolute need to gain control over their history.
Autobiography affords the greatest opportunities to combine the two perspectives
because it develops like a village on the crossroads between the author’s subjective
life and socio-historical life.
While the slave narratives dealt with the problem of racial discrimination on the level of politics and religion, the autobiographies of these selected writers dealt with oppression chiefly on the level of culture. As the central motive is to resolve identity crisis, experience is selected with that in mind, not necessitating the needs of an objective movement. But this resolution is also a political act on a different plane. Once having discovered who he is, the writer may be led back into direct struggle, because he has secured a kind of subjective base camp so to speak, from which to fight. He has worked out the terms on which to reenter the world of objective class relations and mass movements and decide what is going to be his role.

The writers chosen for the present study have widely varied background. Langston Hughes’s father was a wealthy businessman in Mexico whereas Claude McKay spent his boyhood in the countryside of his native Jamaica. Zora Neale Hurston grew up in Eatonville, Florida, an all — black town. McKay and Hughes construct the identities primarily as poets and human beings, making it a point to argue that friendship and art should cut across the color line. Both writers feel more in common with white poets and with the masses of Soviet Russia than with the American Black middle class, but Blackness is an essential part of their identities as poets. Hurston’s autobiography, placed in the larger context of her biography, illustrates the special kind of pressures faced by African American writers of the 1930s and 1940s. In her case, the pressures were both racial and gender-oriented.

So far no attempt has been made to analyze how far the autobiographies of Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston have contemporary relevance and their autobiographies document the process of diversity, growth, inner conflict and disillusionment that all sensitive African American intellectuals experienced in a world where racism is the pervasive reality. Therefore, the researcher thought it appropriate to take up a study on African American Autobiographies of Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston.
It would be worthwhile to have a profile of the subject author’s literary output briefly before delving deep into a critical analysis about their autobiographies. At first, an attempt has been made to have a focus on Claude McKay. McKay has been adored as the proletarian poet. He is one of the greatest forces in bringing about what is called the New Negro Literary Renaissance of the 1920s. In his works of art, he incorporated themes such as racial pride, racial discrimination, racial consciousness, alienation, identity crisis and desire for assimilation. Having worked in a socialist newspaper *The Liberator*, he understood the angst of the working class African Americans and the problems of his subaltern race. He has been known as the most inspirational voice of Harlem Renaissance. It is better to have a look at his contributions to African American Literature in a nutshell at the backdrop of socio-temporal dimensions of his contemporary age.

Claude McKay’s *Banjo: A Novel*, according to *Lincoln Agrippa Daily*, known on the 1920s Marseilles waterfront as Banjo, prowls the rough waterfront bistros with his drifter friends, drinking, looking for women, playing music, fighting, loving, and talking about their homes in Africa, the West Indies, or the American South and about being Black. Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* is, without a doubt, an under-appreciated classic of the Harlem Renaissance. While it lacks the fame of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Home to Harlem* is a vital chronicle of the lives of African American’s low status at Harlem, the cultural Mecca of the 1920s. McKay's protagonist, Jake, in some ways is the ideal representation of the common man of Harlem. Instead of living a life of privilege, Jake sponges off women, holds odd jobs, and generally shows himself to be a non-contributor to society. In stark contrast to many protagonists of Harlem Renaissance literature, Jake is neither poor nor well to do. This rarity makes *Home to Harlem* a fascinating novel. The most lasting contribution of McKay's novel is the way in which it portrays Harlem. There is a meaningful and visible difference between White life and Black life, a divide that, when explored in literature, is nearly always interesting. Not only do McKay's characters speak, presumably, as African Americans did during this time, but they also act in a way that, for better
or worse, show the perceived exoticism of Harlem. Du Bois does not speak favorably of *Home to Harlem* as he finds in it a negative image of African Americans. But it is one of the novel's strongest points that McKay creates characters who act as their real life analogues would. They don't always represent their race well, they do drugs, they drink, they fight and they fornicate. This novel, not intended as some sort of anthropological exercise to convince whites of the similarity of Blacks, paints Harlem as the thrilling, lively, vibrant place that it was. As a result, whether one finds McKay stylistically strong or not, his *Home to Harlem* works brilliantly as, basically, an educational novel, enlightening readers and showing them the amazing place that Harlem is and was.

McKay's *Long Way from Home* is an account of his long odyssey from Jamaica to Harlem and then on to France, Britain, North Africa, Russia, and finally back to America. Apart from depicting his own experiences, the author describes his encounters with such notable personalities as Charlie Chaplin, George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Leon Trotsky, W. E. B. Du Bois, Isadora Duncan, Paul Robeson, and Sinclair Lewis.

First published in 1933, the richly lyrical *Banana Bottom* is often regarded as McKay’s finest novel. His innovation lies in the directness with which he speaks of social and political injustice meted out to African Caribbean and in his choice of the working class as his focus. Claude McKay was an instrumental figure in the Harlem Renaissance.

In his 1937 autobiography, *A Long Way from Home*, McKay explains what it means to be a Black ‘rebel sojourner’ and presents one of the first unflattering, yet informative exposés of the Harlem Renaissance. Reprinted here with a critical introduction by Gene Andrew Jarrett, this book challenges readers to rethink McKay’s articulation of identity, art, race, and politics and situate these topics in terms of his oeuvre and his literary contemporaries between the world wars.
Claude McKay’s *Complete Poems* containing more than three hundred poems, including nearly a hundred published here for the first time, this landmark collection showcases the range and dynamism of Claude McKay, the Jamaican-born poet whose life and work were marked by restless travel and steadfast social protest. McKay eludes easy definition. Hence this complete anthology, vividly introduced and carefully annotated by William J. Maxwell, is at once necessary and rewarding. Here readers can finally trace the complex transnational evolution of a major voice in twentieth-century verse.

Here it would be appropriate to have a glance at the radical democrat of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes who is a poet, novelist, essayist, playwright and autobiographer. His art is firmly rooted in race pride and race consciousness. He is both a nationalist and cosmopolitan. Critics are of the view that he is the most original among African American poets. He describes his life and travels in the Jim Crow South. He is a keen observer of people, places, politics, culture, races and shares his fascinating adventures and insightful reflections from the Spanish Civil War, Soviet Moscow and the Imperialist Japan. His wanderlust leads him to several countries and luminaries of the world. In his autobiography, he tells the hardships of being an African American in the United States and offers comments on the stupidity and injustice of the colour-line. He addressed his poetry to the people, specifically to the black people.

Langston Hughes *I too am American* is a courageous voice of his time, and his authentic call for equality still rings true today. The beautiful paintings of Bryan Collier, a Barack Obama illustrator, accompany and reinvent the celebrated lines of the poem ‘I Too’ creating a breathtaking reminder to all Americans that they are united despite their differences.
In *The Best of Simple*, Langston Hughes picked his favorites from the earlier volumes, stories that not only have proved popular but are now part of a great and growing literary tradition. Arnold Rampersad says that Simple is “one of the most memorable and winning characters in the annals of American literature, justly regarded as one of Hughes's most inspired creations” (11). Simple might be considered an Everyman for African Americans. Hughes himself wrote: “These tales are about a great many people although they are stories about no specific persons as such. But it is impossible to live in Harlem and not know at least a hundred Simples, fifty Joyce’s, twenty-five Zaritas, and several Cousin Minnie’s or reasonable facsimiles thereof” (64).

Hughes’ *Not without Laughter* is a powerful and pioneering classic novel. This stirring coming-of-age tale unfolds in 1930s rural Kansas. A poignant portrait of African American family life in the early twentieth century, it follows the story of young Sandy Rogers as he grows from a boy to a man. Sandy's mother, Annjee, works as a housekeeper for a wealthy white family. His strong-willed grandmother is Hager. Jimboy, Sandy's father travels the country looking for work. Aunt Tempy is the social climber, and Aunt Harriet, the blues singer, has turned away from her faith. A fascinating chronicle of a family's joys and hardships, *Not without Laughter* is a vivid exploration of growing up and growing strong in a racially divided society. A rich and important work, it masterfully echoes the African American experience.

In *I Wonder as I Wander*, Langston Hughes vividly recalls the most dramatic and intimate moments of his life in the turbulent 1930s. His wanderlust leads him to Cuba, Haiti, Russia, Soviet Central Asia, Japan, Spain (during its Civil War), through dictatorships, wars and revolutions. He meets and brings to life the famous and the humble, from Arthur Koestler to Emma, the Black Mammy of Moscow. It is the continuously amusing, wise revelation of an American writer journeying around the often strange and always exciting world he loves.
In *The Big Sea*, Langston Hughes recounts those memorable years in the two great playgrounds of the decade, Harlem and Paris. In Paris, he was a cook and waiter in nightclubs. He knew the musicians and dancers, the drunks and dope friends. In Harlem, he was a rising young poet at the center of the Harlem Renaissance. Arnold Rampersad writes in his incisive new introduction to *The Big Sea*, an American classic, “This is American writing at its best simpler than Hemingway; as simple and direct as that of another Missouri-born writer Mark Twain” (12).

*The Short Stories of Langston Hughes* is a collection of forty-seven stories written between 1919 and 1963. The most comprehensive stories available showcase Langston Hughes's literary blossoming and the development of his personal and artistic concerns. Many of the stories in this book have long been out of print, and others never before collected. These poignant, witty, angry, and deeply poetic stories demonstrate Hughes's uncanny gift for elucidating the most vexing questions of American race relations and human nature in general. *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book* by Langston Hughes contains twenty-six never-before-published short and wonderfully clever poems which take children through both the alphabet and the animal world. From Ape to Zebra with bees, camels, fish, and even a unicorn in between, he paints a picture of each animal with just a few simple, but telling words.

*First Book of Jazz* by Langston Hughes is a useful, simplified introduction to the history of jazz and its techniques, with capsule profiles of musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke, by one of the brightest lights of the Harlem Renaissance and African American letters. The compilation of the writings titled *The Langston Hughes Reader* is drawn from every category of his prodigious literary achievement. It combines the highlights of the novels, stories, plays, poems, songs, and essays that have made him famous with many new writings that have never before been published in book form. Among the new selections are the complete libretto of his popular musical comedy *Simply Heavenly*, all the text of
his pageant *The Glory of Negro History*, a one-act play ‘Soul Gone Home’ and many other stories, poems, and children's lyrics. There are generous portions of his autobiographies, *The Big Sea* and *I Wonder as I Wander*, and of the incomparable Simple trilogy: *Simple Takes a Wife*, *Simple Speaks His Mind*, and *Simple Stakes a Claim*. Langston Hughes is an unchallenged spokesman of African Americans. With art and wit, he has defined the place of Black Americans in all of the diverse forms of American literary expression. This comprehensive anthology is crowded from cover to cover with the characteristic scenes and sentiments that have established his commanding position in world literature.

In the novel for young people, *Popo and Fifina* leave their home in the hills of Haiti to move with their parents to a town by the sea. The next few months are full of adventures --adjusting to a new home, a trip back to the hills for a visit, Popo's work as a carpenter's apprentice, the children's fun with a wondrous kits made by their father, and even a trip to the lighthouse at the end of the island and an amazing tropical storm. When *Popo and Fifina* was first published in 1932, it was greeted with universal approval. *The New York Times* praised its ‘Simple Home-Like Atmosphere’ and suggested that all children's books should be written by poets. It has been a favorite among children, parents, and teachers for more than two decades, and then the new edition introduces its magic to a new generation.

Langston Hughes’ most beloved character comes back to life in the extraordinary collection *Simple's Uncle Sam: With a New Introduction*. Langston Hughes is best known as a poet, but he was also a prolific writer of theatre, autobiography, and fiction. None of his creations won the hearts and minds of his readers as did Jesse B. Semple, better known as "Simple." Simple speaks as an Everyman for African Americans in Uncle Sam's America. With great wit, he expounds on topics as varied as women, Gospel music, and sports heroes but always keeps one foot planted in the realm of politics and race. In recent years, readers have been able to appreciate Simple's situational humor as well as his poignant questions about social injustice in *The Best of Simple* and *The Return of
Simple. Now they can, once again, enjoy the last of Hughes's original Simple books.

Langston Hughes is widely remembered as a celebrated star of the Harlem Renaissance a writer whose bluesy, lyrical poems and novels still have broad appeal. This is evident from *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten*. What's less well known about Hughes is that for much of his life he maintained a friendship with Carl Van Vechten, a flamboyant White critic, writer, and photographer whose ardent support of Black artists was peerless. Their shared interest in Black culture led to a deeply-felt friendship that would span some forty years. They knew everyone from Zora Neale Hurston to Richard Wright, and their letters, lovingly and expertly collected here for the first time, are filled with gossip about the antics of the great and the forgotten, as well as with talk that ranged from race relations to blues lyrics to the nightspots of Harlem, which they both loved to prowl. It’s a correspondence that, as Emily Bernard notes in her introduction, provides “an unusual record of entertainment, politics, and culture as seen through the eyes of two fascinating and irreverent men” (19).

From the publication of his first book titled *The Panther and the Lash* in 1926, Langston Hughes was America's acknowledged poet of colour, the first to commemorate the experience and suffering of African-Americans in a voice that no reader, Black or White, could fail to hear. In this collection of verse, Hughes' voice is more pointed than ever before, as he explicitly addresses the racial politics of the sixties in such pieces as "Prime," "Motto," "Dream Deferred," "Frederick Douglas: 1817-1895," "Still Here," "Birmingham Sunday," "History," "Slave," "Warning," and "Daybreak in Alabama." Sometimes ironic, sometimes bitter, always powerful, the poems in *The Panther and the Lash* are the last testament of a great American writer who grappled fearlessly and artfully with the most compelling issues of his time.
In the delightful children's tale, *The Pasteboard Bandit* an American boy, Kenny Strange, moves to the quiet Mexican town of Taxco with his parents and strikes up a friendship with young Juanito Pérez, a Taxco native. The two boys are brought together by an enchanting toy, the pasteboard bandit Tito. Chosen by Juanito at a town fair from among the other pasteboard toys, Tito, with his colorful clothes and bright eyes, becomes Juanito's and Kenny's constant companion, and the threesome share many adventures in and around the town's rolling green hills. The boys' growing friendship, Kenny's introduction to a culture unlike his own, and Tito's witty reflections on being a toy will be recognized instantly by anyone young or old who has ever made a friend or imagined that a toy might be real. Originally written in 1935, but never before published, *The Pasteboard Bandit* grew out of several trips Langston Hughes made to Mexico during his lifetime. Hughes first went to the town of Toluca at age five to visit his father, and again when he was older. During these visits, Hughes met many writers and artists, and it is their influence that informs the story of *The Pasteboard Bandit*, a story of fusion of two cultures. When Hughes left Mexico for the last time, at the age of thirty two, he was carrying the first draft for *The Pasteboard Bandit*.

*Black Misery* by Langston Hughes was first published in 1969, but the gentle, funny, and sometimes melancholy words of Langston Hughes still cause a blink of recognition. After twenty five years, it remains very much contemporary. In *Black Misery*, one feels the predicament of a Black child adjusting to the new world of integration of the 1960s. One feels the mix of hope and dismay that characterized the decade. Langston Hughes was a writer who often made his readers asks hard questions about life. In *Black Misery*, he wrote about prejudice and indifference but with humour and compassion. Today just as one did twenty five years ago, one smiles and even laughs and one also understands that certain things are more than hard or more than sad. They are pure misery. *Black Misery* was the last book that Langston Hughes wrote. He died in May 1967, while working on its manuscript.
*Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life* is the only collaboration between the two brightest lights of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes. In 1930, two giants of African American literature joined forces to create a lively, insightful, often wildly farcical look inside a rural Southern Black community the three act play *Mule Bone*. In this hilarious story, Jim and Dave are a struggling song and dance team, and when a woman comes between them, chaos ensues in their tiny Florida hometown. This extraordinary theatrical work broke new ground while triggering a bitter controversy between the collaborators that kept it out of the public eye for sixty years. This edition of the rarely seen stage classic features Hurston's original short story, ‘The Bone of Contention’, as well as the complete recounting of the acrimonious literary dispute that prevented *Mule Bone* from being produced or published until decades after the authors’ deaths.

*Let America Be America Again And Other Poems* by Langston Hughes is a beautifully designed collection of some of the greatest poems by a quintessentially American poet, whose theme of the promise of American inclusiveness continues to ring true. Langston Hughes was uncommonly attuned to the ideals of freedom and democracy and the sometimes elusive American dream. The poems collected here offer a hopeful, truly democratic vision for America.

In *Book of Rhythms*, Langston Hughes shares an appreciation of the rhythms of life from visual patterns that catch the eye to rhythms in nature like the beating of a human heart, the pulse of the ocean, and the turning of the planets. With the keen eye of an artist and the perception of a poet, Hughes finds the seeds of rhythm in the slow flowing of the Mississippi River, the even slap-slap-slap of a jump rope, the swoop of a swing, and the steadiness of Grandma's rocking. He relishes the rhythms of nature in the opening of a many petalled rose or the intricacy of a snowflake. He calls up images and offers examples even the youngest reader will understand clapping the rhythm of a favorite song, scrutinizing the lines and wrinkles of the hands, even examining the dining room chairs for charming and graceful rhythms. Originally published in 1954, this new
edition offers original illustrations, an introduction by musician Wynton Marsalis, and an afterword by Hughes’ scholar Robert G. O’Meally. If read it aloud to the youngest children, they become aware of the diversity of the world. Older children will delight in the varied and offbeat exercises and examples, and all ages will be touched by Hughes’ zest for rhythm and for life itself.

*The Mule Bone* by Langston Hughes is a three-act comedy from the Harlem Renaissance. The setting is Florida. The main characters are two song and dance men and Daisy. Here is a classic love triangle. Jealously causes Jim to hit Dave with a mule bone. The town is split over this incident. The Methodists want Jim pardoned. The Baptists want him banished.

Volume three collects the poems of the last period of Hughes’ life. *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) brilliantly fuses the modernist dissonances of bebop jazz with his perception of Harlem life as both a triumph of hope and a deepening crisis. In the tumultuous following years, he refused to relinquish the mantle of the poet, as may be seen in his inspired last two books of verse, *Ask Your Mama* (1961) and *The Panther and the Lash* (1967). *Ask your Mama* demonstrates Hughes’ continuing alertness to the significance of Black music as a guide to American reality. In it, avant-garde jazz rhythms and allusions fueled an intensity of language that predicted the cultural upheavals of the sixties and seventies. Hughes’ last volume, combining old and new poems, emphasizes the struggle for civil rights in the face of reactionary defiance, on the one hand, and the volatility of Black Power, on the other. Vigorous and versatile to the end, Hughes concluded his career as he had begun it. He is a master poet dedicated to observing and celebrating African American culture in its full complexity.
A Pictorial History of African Americans of Langston Hughes contains a few books in the history of publishing have proved as useful and long-lasting as this pioneering work in the popular history of African Americans. The first edition appeared in 1956, on the eve of the Civil Rights revolution. A highly original attempt to portray a crucial but long-neglected part of the American past, it soon became a standard work on Black history. Its rich variety of more than 1,300 illustrations—paintings, drawings, cartoons, prints, posters, broadsides, photographs, sheet music covers, title pages, and stills from television and films—brings home to readers young and old, the look and feel of the dynamic past. This sixth edition captures the changes on the national scene that have influenced African American life during the Reagan-Bush years and the first stages of the Clinton administration. The new text and photographs illuminate social, economic, political, and cultural trends. The authors discuss government and politics, civil rights, arts and letters, sports, labor and employment, schools, the church, and the mass media, highlighting the role of Black leaders who have come to the fore in recent years. Langston Hughes made innumerable contributions to American and world literature and culture. His poems, plays, novels, short stories, and librettos earned him many honors, beginning in the 1920s when he became a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance. By the time of his death in 1967, his work had deeply influenced writers not only at home, but in Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere. As one of the most original of Black poets, he became known as the poet laureate of his people.

In Carol of the Brown King: Nativity Poems, Langston Hughes points out that the wonder of Christmas never ceases. Each year the holiday comes and its story seems fresh and new. The ways of telling about the very first Christmas are as many and as varied as the stars in the sky. And so it was for Langston Hughes, who recounted those long-ago events in six different ways in live poems he wrote and in one he translated from the Spanish. In this memorable book, these six poems are simply and movingly illustrated by Ashley Bryan. That Christmas is for everyone young and old, Black and White, rich and poor has never been more
clearly shown. Though African American children and adults will find the book a special one for them, everyone who takes time to enjoy the book will come away with a new understanding of the holiday. Ashley Bryan has long been known for his interest in and illustration of African American spirituals and poetry. Here he puts his gifts of illustration to work in a way that seems to reflect his dedication to both.

World-renowned poet and master of prose, Langston Hughes enlightened Americans nationwide when his poem ‘Let America Be America Again’ appeared in 1936. Today, more than half a century later, this poem's insights into American society and its dream of social justice continue to resonate powerfully among readers. In celebration of the poem's inspiring message, artist Antonio Frasconi illustrated Hughes' poem with thirty-two woodcuts in an extraordinary limited-edition artist's book, adding a rich visual dimension to the poet's verses. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a noted scholar and W. E. B. Du Bois, Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University, contributed a foreword. A popular edition of this work, ‘Let America Be America Again’ brings their important collaboration to a wider audience, faithfully reproducing the intricacy and subtlety of Frasconi's prints. Each coupling of image and stanza conveys Hughes' and Frasconi's dream of justice for all with compelling force. A call to fulfill this country's potential for greatness, ‘Let America Be America Again’ will touch every American who reads its pages.

Throughout his long career as a poet, fiction writer, and chronicler of the situation of his people all over the world, Langston Hughes also wrote books for children. Whether fiction, poetry, or nonfiction, these works constitute true literature into which he put much research, thought, creative energy, and love. His young readers then and now can sense that they are just as important as his adult audience, while adult readers can appreciate the skill of a great writer who is able to speak to readers of all ages.
In *The First Book of Negroes, The First Book of Rhythms, The First Book of Jazz, The First Book of the West Indies,* and *The First Book of Africa,* all originally published between 1952 and 1960, Hughes hits just the right tone, presenting the history of Africans throughout the world without being condescending or simplistic. It is clear that, for Hughes, Africans and African cultures contribute to a world culture and a world community. Also included in this essential volume are a number of uncollected poems for children called *Black Misery* which he completed just before his death in 1967. Several books were published posthumously — *The Sweet and Sour Animal Book* and *The Pasteboard Bandit,* the latter also was written with Arna Bontemps. Hughes' books for children remain entertaining, moving, beautiful, and relevant. For scholars of African American literature and history and for readers of all ages, these are works to be enjoyed and to be taken seriously.

*Black Magic,* Langston Hughes' last book, presents the vast and sweeping story of African American entertainers like the artists and the musicians, the singers and the dancers, the obscure and the illustrious from the tragic beginnings in slavery to the triumphant artistic achievements of the late 1960s. For a long time, this book was considered the most comprehensive history of African Americans in the performing arts, this milestone in African Americans’ history featuring hundreds of rare and beautiful illustrations. Covering both the obstacles to achievement that these artists faced, and their eventual triumph, *Black Magic,* long out-of-print, is an essential book of American history.

Among the most influential poets of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes is perhaps best remembered for the innovative use of jazz rhythms in his writing. While his poetry and essays received much public acclaim and scholarly attention, Hughes’ dramas are relatively unknown. Only five of the sixty-three plays Hughes scripted alone or collaboratively have been published. Four of Hughes’ most poignant, poetic, and political dramas, *Scottsboro Limited, Harvest, Angelo Herndon Jones,* and *De Organizer* have received critical accolades. Each
play reflects Hughes’ remarkable professionalism as a playwright as well as his desire to dramatize the social history of the African American experience, especially in the context of the labor movements of the 1930s and their attempts to attract African American workers. Hughes himself counted prominent members of these leftist groups among his close friends and patrons. He formed a theatre group with Whittaker Chambers, prompting an FBI investigation of Hughes and his writing in the 1930s. These plays, while easily read as idealistic propaganda pieces for the left, are nonetheless reflective of Hughes’ other more influential and studied works. The first scholar to offer a systematic study of Hughes’ plays, Susan Duffy provides an informed introduction as well as a detailed analysis of each of the four plays. Duffy also establishes that De Organizer collaboration with noted jazz pianist and composer James P. Johnson was indeed performed by the Labor Stage. By making these forgotten texts available, and by presenting them within a scholarly discussion of 1930s leftist political movements, Duffy seeks to spark a renewed interest in Langston Hughes as an American playwright and political figure.

In 1953, African American poet Langston Hughes began corresponding with several South African writers variously affiliated with the legendary Drum Magazine. His letters published in it provide an invaluable glimpse into the growing repression of South African apartheid and the slow but painful progress of the American Civil Rights movement. Apart from revealing a fascinating set of transatlantic friendships between a titan of American letters and a group of writers that includes Peter Clarke, Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, and Richard Rive, they highlight Hughes' enormous influence on the rise of English-language and literature by Black and mixed-race writers in South Africa.

While analyzing the study of two male African American Autobiographers such as Claude McKay and Hughes of the Harlem Renaissance, an equally important female autobiographer has also been chosen for the present study in Zora
Neale Hurston, who has been regarded as the pioneer and role model for the Women writers of African American Literature. Hurston (1891-1960) is a novelist, anthropologist, folklorist, autobiographer and genius of the South. The literary merit of her writings is less known until 1970s. Hurston’s rediscovery is among the most dramatic one in the African American literary history. It was Alice Walker and Maya Angelou who were instrumental in showcasing her to the intelligentsia.

Zora Neale Hurston’s magnum opus *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is one of the most important and enduring books of the twentieth century. It brings to life a Southern love story with wit and pathos. This novel was out of print for almost thirty years due to initial audiences’ rejection of its strong Black female protagonist in Hurston’s classic, Since its 1978 reissue, it has become perhaps the most widely read and highly acclaimed novel in the canon of African American literature.

*Dust Tracks on a Road* is a bold, poignant, and funny autobiography of the novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston’s powerful novels of the South including *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* and, most famously, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* continue to enthrall readers with their lyrical grace, sharp detail, and captivating emotionality. First published in 1942, *Dust Tracks on a Road* is Hurston’s personal story, told in her own words.

As a first-hand account of the weird mysteries and horrors of voodoo, *Tell My Horse* is an invaluable resource and fascinating guide. Based on Zora Neale Hurston's personal experiences in Haiti and Jamaica, where she participated as an initiate rather than just an observer of voodoo practices during her visits in the 1930s, this travelogue into a dark world paints a vividly authentic picture of ceremonies and customs and superstitions of great cultural interest.
When she died in obscurity in 1960, all her books were out of print. Later on, Zora Neale Hurston is recognized as one of the most important and influential modern American writers. *Zora Neale Hurston: Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*, brings together for the first time all of Hurston's best works in one authoritative set. It features the acclaimed 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a lyrical masterpiece about a woman's struggle for love and independence. *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, based on the story of Hurston's parents, details the rise and fall of a preacher torn between spirit and flesh. *Moses, Man of the Mountain* is a high-spirited retelling of the Exodus story in Black vernacular. *Seraph on the Suwanee* portrays the passionate clash between a poor southern "cracker" and her willful husband. A selection of short stories further displays Hurston's unique fusion of folk traditions and literary modernism—comic, ironic, and sparingly poetic.

*The Complete Stories*, a landmark gathering of Zora Neale Hurston's short fiction, most of which appeared only in literary magazines during her lifetime reveals the evolution of one of the most important African American writers. Spanning her career from 1921 to 1955, these stories attest to Hurston's tremendous range and established themes that recur in her longer fiction. With rich language and imagery, the stories in this collection not only map Hurston's development and concerns as a writer but also provide an invaluable reflection of the mind and imagination of the author of the acclaimed novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

The most prolific African American woman author from 1920 to 1950, Hurston was praised for her writing and condemned for her independence, arrogance, and audaciousness. This unique anthology, with fourteen superb examples of her fiction, journalism, folklore, and autobiography, rightfully establishes her as the intellectual and spiritual leader of the next generation of African American writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. In addition to six essays and short stories, the collection includes excerpts from *Dust Tracks on the
Road; Mules and Me; Tell My Horse; Jonah's Gourd Vine; Moses, Man of the Mountain; and Their Eyes Were Watching God. The original commentary by Alice Walker and Mary Helen Washington, two African American writers in the forefront of the Hurston revival, provides illuminating insights into Hurston the writer and the person as well as into American social and cultural history.

Zora Neale Hurston's Jonah's Gourd Vine tells the story of John Buddy Pearson, a young man who loves too many women for his own good. Lucy, his long-suffering wife, is his true love, but there's also Mehaley and Big Oman, as well as the scheming Hattie, who conjures voodoo spells to ensure his attention. Even after becoming the popular pastor of Zion Hope, where his sermons and prayers for cleansing rouse the congregation's fervor, John has to confess that though he is a preacher on Sundays, he is a 'natchel man' the rest of the week. And so in this sympathetic portrait of a man and his community, Zora Neale Hurston shows that faith, tolerance, and good intentions cannot resolve the tension between the spiritual and the physical. That she makes this age-old dilemma come so alive is a tribute to her understanding of the vagaries of human nature.

In the 1939 novel titled Moses, Man of the Mountain, based on the familiar story of the Exodus, Zora Neale Hurston blends the Moses of the Old Testament with the Moses of Black folklore and song to create a compelling allegory of power, redemption, and faith. Narrated in a mixture of biblical rhetoric, Black dialect and colloquial English, Hurston traces Moses' life from the day he is launched into the Nile river in a reed basket, to his development as a great magician, to his transformation into the heroic rebel leader, the Great Emancipator. From his dramatic confrontations with Pharaoh to his fragile negotiations with the wary Hebrews, this very human story is told with great humor, passion, and psychological insight which are the hallmarks of Hurston as a writer and champion of Black culture.
Every Tongue Got to Confess is an extensive volume of African American folklore that Zora Neale Hurston collected on her travels through the Gulf States in the late 1920s. Hurston (1891-1960) rises again with this delightful collection of authentic African American folklore gathered from one hundred and twenty two individuals during her travels in Florida, Alabama, and New Orleans in the late 1920s. Intended for publication in 1929, the manuscript found its way into the National Anthropological Archives of the Smithsonian, where it was rediscovered and authenticated in 1991. Over five hundred tales are presented as Hurston left them in their vernacular dialect with no changes to grammar, spelling, punctuation, syntax or dialect. A few of the tales found in Mules and Men, Hurston contextualize the tales and interject her own personal experiences. This collection offers isolated pieces organized within thematic groups, such as ‘God Tales’ and ‘Mistaken Identity’ tales. There are no interpretations, just annotations of folk expressions and slang taken mostly from Hurston's previously published glossaries and footnotes. With this new collection, Hurston provides an even greater sense of the Black oral tradition, which demands appreciation and admiration. It is highly recommended for general reading and for folklore collections in academic and large public libraries.

Acclaimed for her pitch-perfect accounts of rural Black life and culture, Zora Neale Hurston explores a new territory with her novel Seraph on the Suwanee, a story of two people at once deeply in love and deeply at odds, set among the community of ‘Florida Crackers’ at the turn of the twentieth century. Full of insights into the nature of love, attraction, faith, and loyalty, it follows young Arvay Henson, convinced she will never find true happiness, as she defends herself from unwanted suitors with hysterical fits and religious fervor. But into her life comes bright and enterprising Jim Me Serve, who knows that Arvay is the woman for him, and nothing she can do will dissuade him.
Now frequently anthologized, Zora Neale Hurston's short story ‘Sweat’ was first published in *Fire!!*, a legendary literary magazine of the Harlem Renaissance. Among contributions made by writers like Gwendolyn Bennett, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Wallace Thurman, Hurston’s ‘Sweat’ stood out both for its artistic accomplishment and its exploration of rural Southern Black life. In ‘Sweat’ Hurston claimed the voice that animates her mature fiction, notably the 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The themes of marital conflict and the development of spiritual consciousness were introduced as well. ‘Sweat’ exemplifies Hurston's lifelong concern with women's relation to language and the literary possibilities of Black vernacular. This casebook for the story includes an introduction by the editor, a chronology of the author's life, the authoritative text of ‘Sweat’, and a second story, ‘The Gilded Six-Bits’. Published in 1932, this second story was written after Hurston had spent years conducting fieldwork in the Southern United States. The volume also includes Hurston's groundbreaking 1934 essay, ‘Characteristics of Negro Expression’, and excerpts from her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*. An article by folklorist Roger Abrahams provides additional cultural contexts for the story, as do selected blues and spirituals. Critical commentary comes from Alice Walker, who led the recovery of Hurston's work in the 1970s. Robert Hemenway, Henry Louis Gates, Gayl Jones, John Lowe, Kathryn Seidel, and Mary Helen Washington are all other critics who have extolled the literary merit of Hurston’s works.

Acclaimed anthropologist and folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston traveled the back roads of the rural South, collecting stories from men, women, and children in Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana so that the spirit and richness of the oral storytelling tradition could be shared and preserved.

Though she died penniless and forgotten during her last days, Zora Neale Hurston is now recognized as a major figure in African American literature. Best known for her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she also published numerous short stories and essays, three other novels, and two books on Black
folklore. Even avid readers of Hurston’s prose, however, may be surprised to know that she was also a serious and ambitious playwright throughout her career. Although several of her plays were produced during her lifetime and some to public acclaim they have languished in obscurity for years. Even now, most critics and historians gloss over these texts, treating them as supplementary material for understanding her novels. Yet, Hurston’s dramatic works stand on their own merits and independently of her fiction. Now, eleven of these forgotten dramatic writings are being published together for the first time in a carefully edited and annotated volume *Real Negro Theatre*. Filled with lively characters, vibrant images of rural and city life, biblical and folk tales, voodoo, and most importantly, the blues, readers will discover a *Real Negro Theatre* that embraces all the richness of Black life.

Zora Neale Hurston in her work titled *Roy Makes a Car*, points out that down in Eatonville, Florida, there's a man who can clean spark plugs just by looking at them hard, and who can grease an axle faster than one can say ‘carburetor’. Folks round those parts claim Roy Tyle might just be the best mechanic in the world. But Roy, can never find an automobile made to suit him. He figures, if a car was built right, there wouldn't be so many collisions out on the road. And so when Roy that wonder-making man says that he's going to make an accident-proof car, there's no telling what he'll cook up behind his double-locked doors. Based on a tall tale collected by legendary African American writer Zora Neale Hurston, Mary E. Lyons's souped-up story is perfectly complemented by Terry Widener's bold, dramatic illustrations.

The stories in *The Skull Talks Back* have been selected from *Every Tongue Got To Confess*, Zora Neale Hurston's third volume of folklore. Through Joyce Carol Thomas's carefully adapted text and Leonard Jenkins' arresting illustrations, the soulful and fanciful imaginations of ordinary folk will reach readers of all ages.
Zora Neale Hurston told the writer Countee Cullen in the work titled *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* that she meant to live and die by her own mind. Arriving in Harlem in 1925 with little more than a dollar to her name, Hurston rose to become one of the central figures of the Harlem Renaissance, only to die in obscurity. Not until the 1970s was she rediscovered by Alice Walker and other admirers. Although Hurston has entered the pantheon as one of the most influential American writers of the 20th century, the true nature of her personality has proven elusive. A brilliant, complicated and utterly arresting woman emerges from Alice Walker’s landmark book, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*. Carla Kaplan, a noted Hurston scholar, has found hundreds of revealing, previously unpublished letters for this definitive collection; she also provides extensive and illuminating commentary on Hurston’s life and work, as well as an annotated glossary of the organizations and personalities that were important to it. From her enrollment at Baltimore’s Morgan Academy in 1917 to correspondence with Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Langston Hughes, Dorothy West and Alain Locke, to a final query letter to her publishers in 1959, Hurston’s spirited correspondence offers an invaluable portrait of a remarkable, irrepressible talent.

The works reviewed above have not given an adequate picture of the personal and societal identities of Claude McKay, Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston which have contemporary relevance. Their autobiographies document the process of diversity, growth, inner conflict and disillusionment that all sensitive African American intellectuals have experienced in a world where racism is the pervasive reality. The present autobiographical study is undertaken to illustrate the self steeped in a hostile society.

While the slave narratives dealt with the problems of racial discrimination on the level of politics and religion, the autobiographies of the subject authors dealt with oppression chiefly on the level of culture. As the central motive is to resolve identity crises, their transforming the personal experience into racial document is selected with that in mind, not necessitating the needs of an objective movement.
But resolution is also a political act on a different plane. Once having discovered, the writer may be led back into direct struggles, because he has secured a kind of subjective so to speak, from which to fight. The writer has worked out the terms on which to reenter the world of objective class relations and mass movements and decide what his role would be.

Even though all the three autobiographers chosen for the present study were born in different topographies with varied socio-temporal dimensions, they converge at one common point. That is, using their art to express their pain and suffering and thus registering it as a protest against the white oppression. Talking about racial oppression and racial pride is an essential part of their identity as poets or autobiographers. The vision of the Harlem Renaissance movement influenced the male autobiographers McKay and Hughes so much and they resolved that they should make use of art for propaganda. In the case of Hurston, the pressures were off racial, gender-oriented and anthropologist oriented.

The cultural materialists view all representations of the subalterns as struggles for meaning and power. Literary texts are often sites of such struggles. With a view to delineating the struggles of the selected writers in their works, a sociological approach has been made keeping in view of the tenets of cultural materialism.