

## Literary Horizons should be Broadened to Include Black Writers

We carry our history with us

*"History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us"* – James Baldwin.

Our social, cultural, technological, landscape is in constant flux. As history is being made daily there is an onslaught of focal points drawing our attention. But if we, as a society, are to develop an understanding of each other and make sense of current events we must be intentional. From literature to social justice, from legislation to inventions there is so much to learn. The aphorism, Black history is American history, means very little if it is only a sidenote.

When I ask my students about an African American poet, [Maya Angelou's name](#) is a solid response. When I ask for another poet's name, if I am lucky, I will hear [Langston Hughes](#). After that I am usually asked if lyrics count and can it be a friend or does it have to be someone published in a book. Names of hip-hop rappers are thrown up like a handful of confetti. I say, "Yes and no." Yes, lyrics and music count. No, we need to explore further, broaden our repertoire, and include more writers and poets.

While talking about historic literary figures with a friend he quickly offered [Jessie Redmon Fauset](#) for her pivotal role in the [Harlem Renaissance](#), as editor of the [NAACP's](#) magazine [The Crisis](#) which was home for many prominent writers in that movement. He talked about Fauset as though the two of them had been long time friends, even though they are separated by more than a century of time.

Part of the gift of history is learning how people achieved goals despite, or because of expectations. We learn to make pathways to success and to develop an appreciation for grit; this in turn becomes a legacy to nurture in our everyday lives. Sometimes the bond with a person from history comes from another century and sometimes it comes from an adjacent city.

The mother of [Afrofuturism](#) was born and raised in Pasadena. Science-fiction literary giant [Octavia Butler](#) has garnered [Hugo](#) and [Nebula](#) Awards. [The Huntington Library](#) has hosted a display of her work and life, her notebooks, affirmations and list of her writing goals (*which I thought was really cool*). A posthumous tribute to her resilient spirit, Butler achieved one of her listed goals when her novel, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), appeared on New York Times Best Seller List in 2020.

In the words of the great [James Baldwin](#): "History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history". On May 25, 2020 history demanded that we witness the horrific murder of George Floyd and respond. In the midst of a pandemic with all our usual

distractions shut down, as a country, we were forced to search for answers. Throughout the summer, books about racism were on every best seller list.

We are accustomed to “how to” books in hopes of instructions on moving towards a goal. *How to Be an Antiracist* by [Ibram X. Kendi](#) does not disappoint. He provides honest self-reflection to demonstrate areas in his own thinking that needed to be changed, and he challenges the reader to do the same. We are now finding time to sit, read, and learn from history, personal and collective; we are in the process of measuring the actions we choose to take against the results we hope to manifest to change our history for the better.

[Inlandia Institute](#) responded to May 25<sup>th</sup> by inviting local African-American writers to develop programs for community voices. The creative collective decided to call the platform Blacklandia. [Nikia Chaney](#), editor of *San Bernardino Singing*, Natalie Graham and Keya Vance of [Kayjo Creatives](#) produced *Voices of I, Too, and* Lydia Theon Ware is facilitating a five-week writer’s workshop, Butterflies Can Hollar. There are more participants involved with Blacklandia and more programs to attend in the upcoming months. These events are becoming a part of our shared history of promising to never forget while working towards a place of healing.

Let us continue to broaden the spaces we make to read and hear diverse voices. It will be an anchor when the world is swirling with distractions that drain. History informs and warns, reminds and reveals, encourages and nourishes.