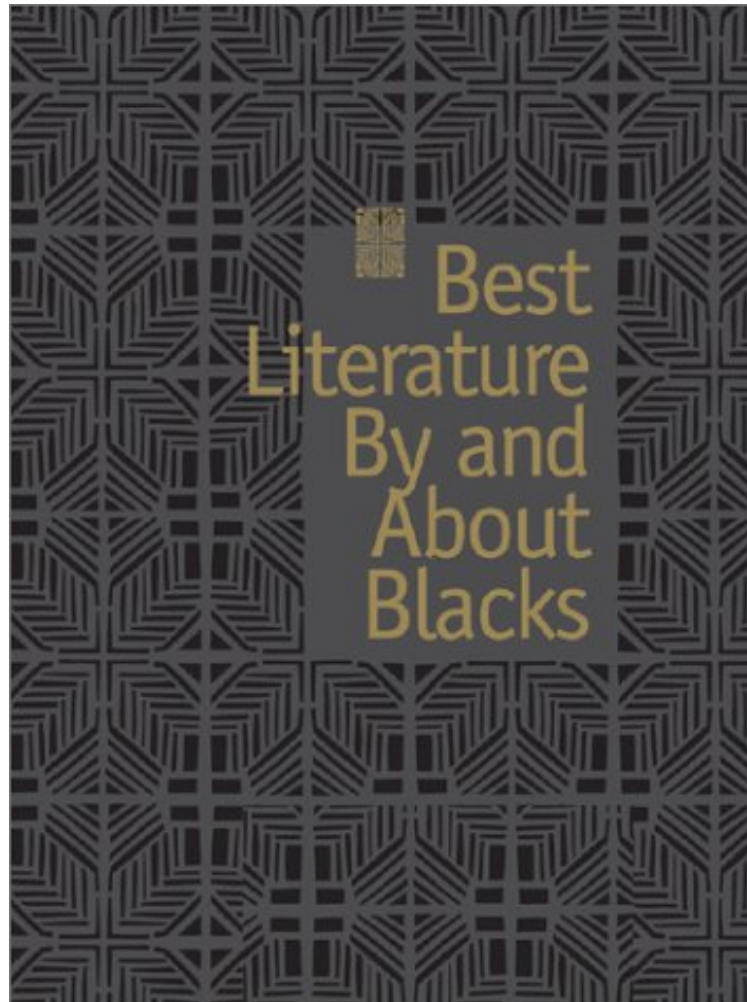


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Best Literature by and about Blacks 1

Phillip M. Richards

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From Library JournalThis reference work by Richards (English, Colgate Univ.) and Schlager (editor of When Technology Fails) contains brief summaries of poetry, drama, fiction, literary criticism, and nonfiction by and about African Americans. While the emphasis is on literary works, annotations on such subjects as the Civil Rights

Movement, health issues, and slavery are also included. Although the book could serve several purposes—for plot summaries, as a guide for collection development, for reader's advisory—its value is curtailed by an almost total absence of analysis. Perhaps it is most useful for locating obscure works for which summaries are otherwise unavailable (e.g., Narena Easterling's novel *A Strange Way from Home*, May Miller's play *Bog Guide*). The arrangement into four chronological periods (1750-1860, 1860-1900, 1900-40, and 1940-present, where three-quarters of the summaries fall) and the alphabetical index containing authors, titles, subjects, and keywords are user friendly. Even with its limitation, this is a worthwhile purchase for collections emphasizing African American literature and culture. Still, Gale's *What Do I Read Next?: Multicultural Literature* is a better choice for most libraries; it includes information on where to obtain reviews, and the section on African Americans is nearly as long as the book under review.

Louis J. Parascandola, Long Island Univ., Brooklyn Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Booklist* Organized by historical era (1750-1860, 1860-1900, 1900-1940, 1940-present) and then by genre (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, and literary criticism), this guide to information on significant writers and works in African American literature and history is written for students and teachers, librarians, and researchers. Each time period and, within the time periods, each genre is introduced by an essay to provide the historical context in which the works were created. The section on the period from 1940 to the present is the most substantive, taking up three-quarters of the book. The authors have compiled entries for 1,867 titles. Each numbered entry is listed by author's name and includes title, bibliographic information, an annotation, subjects covered, and awards won (if any). Annotations are more descriptive than evaluative and range in length from two or three to twenty lines. The easy-to-use index, which lists authors, titles, subjects, and keywords, is essential, because some authors appear under more than one time period and more than one genre. Although many authors may be familiar to readers, the volume helps introduce lesser-known names and works. In addition to entries for the novels of Ernest Gaines, the works of Henry Louis Gates Jr., and the poetry of Nikki Giovanni and Ntozake Shange, one also finds entries for Captain Cuffe's *Logs and Letters, 1808-1817: A Black Quaker's "Voice from within the Veil"* and Lorraine Hansberry's unfinished play, *Les Blancs*. In keeping with the title, classics written about blacks by white authors, such as Jonathan Kozol's *Amazing Grace* and Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, are included. Because the authors don't explain their selection criteria, it's hard to know why some books and authors are or are not here. Though most of the titles are works of African American literature and history written for adults, a few children's books are listed. Readers will also find at least one non-American title, Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. The volume would be easier to use if eras and genres were indicated at the top of each page. Despite these minor problems, this is a highly readable reference work that could satisfy the browser as well as the serious student. It could also help in collection development in public and academic libraries. RBB

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