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The Black Arts Enterprise and the Production of African American Poetry

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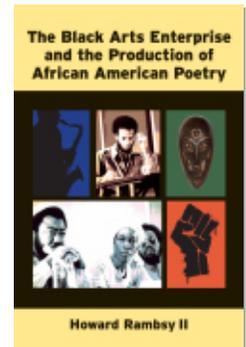
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2 • Platforms for Black Verse

The Roles of Anthologies

The back cover of Dudley Randall's 1969 anthology *Black Poetry: A Supplement to Anthologies which Exclude Black Poets* notes that "because students at the University of Michigan complained that anthologies used in introductory poetry courses contained no Black poets, Broadside Press was asked to compile a sample collection."¹ Randall's forty-eight-page collection contains poems by Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Gwendolyn Brooks, Etheridge Knight, and LeRoi Jones, among others. Interestingly, only two years later, when Randall published his anthology *The Black Poets*, he somewhat shifted his focus. Rather than concentrating on efforts to supplement anthologies that exclude black poets, Randall was in the position of justifying the need for yet another collection of African American verse. Partly because of the Black Arts Movement, explained Randall, "there are so many anthologies of black poetry that each editor must justify the publication of a new one."² Dudley's *The Black Poets* was one among at least sixty other anthologies published between 1965 and 1976 that served the crucial role of extending the visibility of African American poetry. The publication of so many anthologies featuring black verse contributed significantly to the idea that the poets were engaged in a coordinated and collective enterprise.

Although literary journals publish hundreds of poets, anthologies tend to be especially helpful in extending the shelf life, literally and figuratively, of poets and poems. Indeed, anthologies are among the most important platforms for the presentation and preservation of poetry. As literary critic Cary Nelson observes, "the only sure way to keep a poem alive is to anthologize it."³ During the time period, editors and publishers ensured that poems initially published in literary journals and volumes of poetry would have new and extended lives in anthologies. In

addition, editors utilized anthologies as platforms from which to express their political commitments and literary-cultural values. The use of a common discourse, as well as the inclusion of an interconnected group of writers, highlighted the links among the numerous anthologies published during the time period.

The anthologies of the black arts era frequently characterized poets as political activists; promoted ideas of liberation; and celebrated the dynamics of African American expressive culture, most notably by drawing attention to connections between black music and poetry. Between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, editors of African American anthologies published a fairly select group of poets and drew frequently from such sources as *Negro Digest/Black World*, the *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Black Dialogue*, and *Freedomways*. Even though anthologies played a defining role in the transmission of poetry, few studies have examined how and to what ends these collections functioned. Paying attention to the operations of anthologies reveals their importance in the production of literature. More specifically, “editorial organizing” represented integral practices in the construction of black arts anthologies—those multiauthored texts that assisted in shaping the contours of the movement.

Editorial organizing, especially as envisioned in this chapter, comprises the decision-making processes that inform the production of anthologies, such as titling; selecting entries; arranging the selections; and framing the overall entries in the introduction, afterword, and contributor notes. Whereas editorial organizing is typically attributed to the editor or coeditors of a single anthology, these efforts actually always represent the results of collaborations with authors, copyright holders, and publishing institutions. A focus on editorial organizing sheds light on how the design and function of anthologies affected the circulation of a broad range of African American poetry. How do the arrangements of poems in anthologies influence how readers might interpret those selections and their authors individually and collectively? In what ways do editors construct their anthologies in order to appeal to particular readerships? How did the design and proliferation of anthologies relate to the progression of the Black Arts Movement? This line of inquiry indicates the types of questions and issues raised in an approach based on editorial organizing.

The organizing efforts of anthologists shape the presentation of poets and poems in a number of ways that determine the circumstances by which readers encounter the writers and their selections. For one, the arrangement of poems in an anthology based on specific themes could

reveal common interests among a group of diverse poets. An anthology arranged chronologically, for example, situates poems and poets in history more readily for readers. Also, editors often decide how a single poet might be represented based on the selections chosen for inclusion by that writer. An editor wanting to display the fiery and confrontational features of militant black poetry would be more inclined to publish Nikki Giovanni's "The True Import of Present Dialogue: Black vs. Negro," which includes the recurring line "Nigger Can you kill," as opposed to the more personal and reflective poems in her volume of poetry *My House*. When trying to account for the extensive production of poetry during the black arts era, factors associated with editorial organizing cannot be overlooked.

Historically, anthologies have been crucial to the transmission of black literary art. In a survey of African American anthologies, literary critic Kenneth Kinnamon observes that "several anthologies appeared in the 1920s, few in the 1930s and 1940s, almost none in the 1950s." Not surprisingly, then, anthologies of the 1920s, most notably *The New Negro*, were associated with the Harlem Renaissance, while the paucity of anthologies in the three subsequent decades might explain why so many African American poets of those eras had to be "rediscovered" during more modern times. Kinnamon goes on to note that "beginning in the 1960s, the production of anthologies accelerated."⁴ Indeed, the increased publication of African American anthologies during the era served the interests of cultural workers seeking to advance a movement among literary artists, and anthologies continue to shape how readers envision the tradition of African American literature. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, one of the more well-known contemporary anthologies, contains many of the most critically acclaimed black writers in literary history and shapes how students around the world view the tradition of African American literature. Anthologies often function to present a wide range of writers in a common site. As a result, these collections bring more attention to racial and cultural connections among the contributors' literary art. Projecting a united front and underscoring the links among various writers were evidently defining features of black arts discourse.

A Collective Enterprise

Anthologists who regularly presented African American poetry designed their collections to coincide with developing political and cultural move-

ments of the time period. For one, the titles, arrangement of selections, introductions, and other features associated with the design of anthologies contributed to how effectively these collections solidified the formation of a distinct discourse and a canon of black poetry. In addition, anthologists regularly showcased poems that promoted black consciousness and made direct appeals to African American audiences. In the process, anthologists facilitated the connections between poets and readerships interested in African American concerns and went well beyond simply compiling a selection of writings. Along with publishers, anthologists often made editorial decisions that influenced the ways readers might view the poets, their poems, and the collective enterprise among poets.

The titles of anthologies enabled editors and publishers to situate their books within a common African American discourse. Consider the following brief listing of anthologies: *Black Fire* (1968), edited by LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal; *Dark Symphony* (1968), edited by James Emmanuel and Theodore L. Gross; *For Malcolm* (1969), edited by Dudley Randall and Margaret Burroughs; *Black Voices* (1968) and *New Black Voices* (1972), edited by Abraham Chapman; *Black Arts* (1969), edited by Ahmed Alhamisi and Harum Kofi Wangara; *soulscript* (1970), edited by June Jordan; *On Being Black* (1970), edited by Charles T. Davis and Daniel Walden; *We Speak as Liberators* (1970), edited by Orde Coombs; *The New Black Poetry* (1970), edited by Clarence Major; *Natural Process* (1970), edited by Ted Wilentz and Tom Weatherly; and *Black Spirits* (1972), edited by Woodie King. As these titles suggest, anthologists often relied on racially marked language to frame their books. These book titles alerted readers that they were preparing to enter a distinct cultural space or African American discourse community.

Editors frequently drew on nationalist discourse by using the word *black*, African American terminology, and concepts associated with liberation in the titles and subtitles of their anthologies. Doing so enabled them to appeal more directly to the sensibilities of black readerships. The culturally distinct titles of the anthologies appealed to audiences interested in African American issues and also functioned as important framing devices for situating the contents of the collections. Editors also utilized concepts of newness to frame their books—an indication that the materials in their collections were at the vanguard of poetic production. The titles of anthologies edited by Chapman, Henderson, Major, and Wilentz and Weatherly underscored the “new” label placed on black poetry of the 1960s and implied to audiences that they were reading fresh, cutting-edge material.

The inclusion of poets in anthologies helped to confirm their membership within a common African American discourse, regardless of any differences they may have held. The introductions to these anthologies certainly suggest that the contributors were pursuing a common enterprise. “Black poets here,” writes Clarence Major in the introduction to *The New Black Poetry*, “are practically and magically involved in collective efforts to trigger real social change, correction throughout the zones of this republic.”⁵ In the introductory comments to *Black Arts*, Ahmed Alhamisi explains that the essays and poems included represent “the chants the prayers songs drumbeats of warriors and lovers.”⁶ In the foreword to *Black Fire*, Baraka introduces the contributors by explaining that “these are the founding Fathers and Mothers, of our nation. We rise, as we rise (agin).” He goes on to conclude, “We are presenting. Your various selves. We are presenting, from God, a tone, your own. Go on. Now.”⁷ As Major’s, Alhamisi’s, and Baraka’s introductions imply, despite geographical, political, and ideological differences, the anthologists linked several different poets to overlapping agendas relating broadly to black people and social activism.

The sense of solidarity produced by anthologies overshadowed what may have been vital dissimilarities among contributors. James Smethurst’s meticulous study of the development of the Black Arts Movement pays careful attention to the distinct regions and varied approaches of poets and black arts activists. His book illuminates the divergent interests, generational differences, and dissimilar approaches to writing poetry that existed among a large group of writers. These writers were, nonetheless, frequently categorized under the label “black arts.” The different writing styles and geographic locations of a Gwendolyn Brooks and a Larry Neal, for instance, or a Lance Jeffers and a Carolyn Rodgers, did not prevent anthologists from including their works in the same collections. The routine publication of diverse writers in common venues perhaps downplayed views of their differences while highlighting their commonalities.

What about writers such as Al Young, Robert Hayden, and Lucille Clifton, who are not typically identified as black arts poets? Their appearance in so many African American anthologies associated with the cultural movement reveals that they were indeed contributors to black arts discourse. As mentioned previously, the disdain that some younger writers expressed toward Robert Hayden was well publicized, but editors did not seem as dismissive of his works. The appearance of Hayden’s poems in collections published during the late 1960s and 1970s

made several of his poems widely available. Editors most often selected Hayden's "Ballad of Remembrance," "Frederick Douglass," "Homage to the Empress of the Blues," "Middle Passage," and "Runagate Runagate" for inclusion. Notably, "Runagate Runagate" and "Frederick Douglass" appeared in approximately twenty anthologies between 1968 and 1974. The anthologists effectively inscribed Hayden and his poem into the canon of black writing.

A close look at the design and arrangement of *For Malcolm*, *Black Fire*, and *Understanding the New Black Poetry* reveals more clearly how editorial decisions utilized in the production of these popular collections extended the vision of a cultural movement with poets at the forefront. *For Malcolm*, edited by Dudley Randall and Margaret Burroughs, was one of the most well-known anthologies published by an African American press. The anthology suggests that Malcolm X was a major source of creative and political inspiration for black poets. The book's subject matter, organization, and supporting materials shape the overall function of the individual poems. The anthology opens with a photo of Malcolm X dated February 1965, the month and year that the minister was assassinated, and the book is dedicated to "Mrs. Betty Shabazz," Malcolm's widow. In addition to featuring selections by poets, the anthology presents readers with several other writings that help frame how they might engage the poems. The table of contents arranges the poems into four sections: "The Life," "The Death," "The Rage," "The Aftermath." The book contains two indexes, one of authors and one of poems.

Near the beginning of the book, *For Malcolm* also contains a six-page biography of the leader, a preface by Ossie Davis explaining why he eulogized Malcolm X, and an introduction by the editors that explains the back story of the book's publication. After "hearing Margaret Walker read her poem on Malcolm X at the Fisk University Writers' Conference in April 1966," Dudley Randall and Margaret Burroughs explain, they decided to publish a book of poems dedicated to the late leader.⁸ Randall and Burroughs go on to note the large and diverse group of poets who submitted works, including prominent poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, and LeRoi Jones; "prolific and much-published poets" such as Clarence Major, John Sinclair, and Ted Joans; and "talented young poets" such as Sonia Sanchez, Mari Evans, and Larry Neal (xx). Randall and Burroughs's explanation of how the anthology came into being suggests a grassroots effort among poets. According to Randall and Burroughs, *For Malcolm* emerged out of an impulse on the part

of writers to organize around a political subject and direct their concerted efforts at memorializing a figure who “didn’t bite his tongue, but spelled out the evil done by the white man and told him to go to hell” (xxi). The editors highlight the range of poets and poetic styles included in their book and showcase the existence of a diverse body of writings among African American poets. Actually, the book also contains a few white writers as well.

The editors of *For Malcolm* influenced how readers might view the contributors beyond their poems by including extensive biographical notes, which contain information on the lives of the poets, their publication records, their works in progress, and a list of their awards and other achievements. Just in case these biographical details are not enough, the book also includes photographs of the contributors. Near the end of the collection, the editors provide a bibliography of works by and about Malcolm X and a reprint of Ossie Davis’s popular eulogy. The assortment of short essays, photos, and biographical information in *For Malcolm* situates the poets and their poems within a common African American literary and sociopolitical enterprise. That enterprise was part of the larger black arts discourse that praised Malcolm X, celebrated black people, and promoted political and cultural liberation.

The appearance of several poets in the common site of an anthology influenced the implications of individual poems. Part of what makes single Malcolm X poems by writers Larry Neal, Sonia Sanchez, Etheridge Knight, and Margaret Walker carry particular significance is that they were published together in one venue. Certainly, each individual poem can be analyzed for its own literary merits. However, individual poems published in anthologies sometimes rely on the larger collection to communicate meaning. Consider Mari Evans’s poem “The Insurgent.” The speaker of the poem mentions seeking freedom and liberty. However, nowhere in the poem is that speaker directly identified as Malcolm X. If the poem was published individually or in another site, how would readers know that the poem was paying homage to Malcolm? The appearance of Evans’s “The Insurgent” in *For Malcolm* becomes crucial for readers to know that the poem refers to Malcolm. In short, Evans’s poem relies on its site of publication, a collection on Malcolm, to fill in the spaces that the poem may leave blank.

For Malcolm, explains James Smethurst, “is truly a national anthology with a range of poets from the East and West coasts and, to a lesser extent, the South.” And more so than the more popular *Black Fire*, observes Smethurst, Randall and Burroughs’s anthology “attempts to

bridge the generations and eras of political activism while maintaining a militant, nationalist stance.” Further, Smethurst finds *For Malcolm* “anomalous,” based on “the presence of several white radical poets among the contributors.”⁹ The publication of white poets in an African American anthology was in fact fairly unique. However, the editing of African American anthologies by white men was more common. Daniel Walden, Keneth Kinnamon, Abraham Chapman, and Arnold Adoff all edited or coedited anthologies featuring African American writings. Their contributions, not to mention the fact that most anthologies were financed by nonblack presses, reveal that the production of African American collections was hardly a black-exclusive endeavor.

Still, the Broadside Press imprint on *For Malcolm* signaled audiences that the book was produced in a black context and in the interests of an African American readership. In retrospect, publishing so many prominent and emerging African American writers in a single collection helped establish Broadside Press’s reputation as a respected and influential black publishing institution. *For Malcolm* was one of the earliest book projects of Broadside Press and thus linked the press to one of the movement’s most revered figures.¹⁰ Therefore, just as the founders of the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School in Harlem associated the origins of their enterprise with the untimely death of Malcolm, Broadside Press similarly marked its beginnings in publishing by focusing on the slain leader as well. Overall, the arrangement and confluence of poetry, prose, and photographs in *For Malcolm*, as well as the reputations of the anthology’s contributors and publisher, affected the collection’s importance in African American literary culture.

Although *For Malcolm* was one of the earliest anthologies to include several writers who would later become associated with the New Black Poetry, Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka’s anthology *Black Fire* may have been the era’s single most influential anthology in terms of visibly promoting the agenda of militant black poetry and its proponents. Published in 1968, *Black Fire* is a multigenre anthology that includes essays, poetry, fiction, and drama. The writings in *Black Fire* cover a range of topics and issues including nationalism, black music, the effects of antiblack racism, and self-determination. More important for this discussion, however, the visual presentation, the varied contributions, and the statements by the editors of *Black Fire* contributed to the anthology’s status as one of the most popular collections of the black arts era.

On the center of the cover of the anthology, an orange and fiery background displays the black lettering of the title. Below the title, the

anthology's subtitle, "An Anthology of Afro-American Writing," and the names of its editors, LeRoi Jones and Larry Neal, appear in cursive writing. The blend of black and orange used on the cover accentuates the idea of black explosiveness, expressed in the main title of the collection. The book was published the same year as the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and during an era when African Americans participated in riots in cities across the United States, so the ideas of fire and rage were certainly on the minds of large numbers of black people. So even before readers opened the book, the title of Jones and Neal's collection oriented them to a strong sense of rage among African American writers. Significantly, the title of the anthology foregrounds the writers' relationship to political activism.

In addition to the title, several other features relating to the organization and presentation of the book operate to situate the anthology and frame its contributors within the larger currents of a black and emergent movement. Though more subtle than the title, the designation "writing" in the subtitle of the book is noteworthy, as the reference to the selections in the anthology as "Afro-American Writing" distances the contributors and their works from more formal traditions of "literature." On the credits page, the anthology acknowledges a number of publications for granting reprinting rights. Notably, the most frequent sources for reprints were *Negro Digest*, *Liberator*, and other African American periodicals. As a result, the acknowledgment pages at the beginning of the book provide evidence that many of the writings in *Black Fire* were linked to a network of black publishing sites.

Baraka's foreword and Neal's afterword function as important documents in defining for readers the mission of the contributing poets. Written in a "strange new grammar and syntax,"¹¹ Baraka's foreword suggests that the contributors to the anthology are involved in an endeavor larger than only producing literature. "We are being good. We are the beings of goodness, again," Baraka writes. "We will be righteous and our creations good and strong and righteous, and teaching" (xvii). Referring to the contributors as "poet/philosophers" and black artists as "warriors," Baraka seeks to orient readers to a view of writers that goes beyond conventional definitions. According to Baraka, the writers in *Black Fire* are doing work of a higher calling: "We are presenting, from God, a tone, your own, Go on. Now" (xviii). Baraka explains that the writers are involved in a common agenda and that they are acting on behalf of black people.

Larry Neal's often-cited afterword, entitled "And Shine Swam On,"

charts the objectives of new black artists. “We don’t have all the answers,” writes Neal, “but have attempted, through the artistic and political work presented here to confront our problems from what must be called a radical perspective.”¹² Neal goes on to make connections and draw contrasts between the cultural movement among artists of the 1960s and past African American cultural movements. He elaborates on how African American poets seeking to utilize radical perspectives in their writings and appeal to black audiences must incorporate the spirit of Malcolm X and musicians such as John Coltrane and James Brown in their writings.

Neal closes his essay by informing readers that “the artist and the political activist are one. They are both shapers of the future reality” (656). Baraka’s foreword and Neal’s afterword establish motives and explanations for the poetry and other writings included in their anthology. The editors’ statements prompt readers on how they might interpret and recognize the connections between the various contributors and poems of *Black Fire*. Framed within the spaces of a fiery cover, acknowledgments to black sources, a foreword by Baraka, an afterword by Larry Neal, essays on one side and fiction and drama on the other, the fifty-plus poets and over 140 poems included in *Black Fire* gain meaning in part because of the site where they appear. Baraka and Neal contextualize the contributions of the anthology within an emerging black radical movement in literature and refer to black writers as activists, “warriors, priests, lovers and destroyers,” thus representing the multidimensional nature of black arts writers (Neal, “And Shine Swam On,” 656).

The contributors’ notes to *Black Fire* allow the writers to identify their publication record and also express their commitment to African Americans and various activist organizing projects. The contributors represent themselves in their author biographies as activists and writers. As a result, many of these notes emphasize that they are not poets in the conventional sense. After identifying where Askia Toure’s poems have appeared, for instance, the biographical note informs readers, “He is one of the prime movers of the new spirit in Black Art. He is an extremely active poet, reading his works wherever Black people gather.”¹³ Similarly, biographical notes on Bob Bennet and Edward Spriggs reveal their involvement with black communities. In his statement, Norman Jordan explains that he has “stopped trying to have my poetry published” in mainstream venues. “As long as I am having my work produced here for black people, my black people, I am happy” (665). Like

Black Fire, several other anthologies such as *Black Spirits*, *We Speak as Liberators*, *The Forerunners*, and *Natural Process* include biographical sketches that highlight the experiences of contributors as poets and as organizers and activists within African American communities. For many of the contributors, it appears, revealing their activist involvement with black folks was as important as revealing their publication records.

Another intriguing example of how Baraka and Neal helped shape views of the New Black Poetry in their anthology appears as a “note to the first paperback edition of *Black Fire*.” Here, Baraka and Neal observe that “it is obvious that work by: Don Lee, Ron Milner, Alicia Johnson, Carl Boissiere, Katibu (Larry Miller), Halisi, Quincy Troupe, Carolyn Rodgers, Jayne Cortez, and Jewell Latimore shd be in this collection.”¹⁴ Unfortunately, though, “various accidents” prevented works by these artists from appearing in the first edition of *Black Fire*. The editors state that “these devils,” presumably their white publisher, claimed that reprint costs were too expensive to include the aforementioned artists in the paperback edition. Thus, the editors expressed their hope that they could include the absent writers in the second edition. In a direct address to their audience, they conclude, “The frustration of working thru these bullshit white people shd be obvious” (xvi). Baraka and Neal’s critique of their white publisher functions as a humorous and biting rhetorical display. Their note also confirms that the writers were attempting to communicate directly to a black audience or an audience sympathetic to African Americans. The willingness of the editors to openly criticize their publisher and speak of its management as “devils” authenticates Baraka and Neal’s stance as militant black writers and enables them to further mark their anthology as a black-controlled space. That black space was also a white space.

Although seemingly quiet and unassuming in the process, the publishing house in question, William Morrow, actively contributed to the production of *Black Fire*. The officials at William Morrow, not Baraka and Neal, for instance, had the final word on whether the critical “note to the first paperback edition of *Black Fire*” would appear in the anthology. Maybe the publisher was not threatened by the comments of the editors. Or perhaps they figured that including Baraka and Neal’s complaint could actually help sell more books. Whatever the case, although the editors were speaking to African Americans, they were able to reach such a wide black and nonblack audience in large part because they spoke through a publishing outfit financed by a mainstream white publisher. Actually, quiet as it’s kept, William Morrow played a crucial role in

publishing key African American and black arts texts during the 1960s and 1970s. Amiri Baraka's *Blues People*, *Black Music*, and his plays *The Dutchman* and *The Slave*; Harold Cruse's *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*; volumes of poetry by Nikki Giovanni; Stephen Henderson's *Understanding the New Black Poetry*; and plays by Ed Bullins—all were published by William Morrow. The publisher was an indispensable facilitator of black poetry and writings by African American artists in general. Grove Press, Random House, and Doubleday all played significant roles in publishing African American and black arts literature during the era as well.¹⁵ Whereas black arts writers often promoted African American institution building and encouraged writers to publish with black-owned presses, the national exposure that African American poetry received was definitely a result of support provided by mainstream publishers.

While *For Malcolm* and *Black Fire* oriented readers to the interest poets had in addressing black nationalist politics, *Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References*, edited by Stephen Henderson, revealed an even broader sense of the place of the New Black Poetry in the history of African American expressive culture. Henderson's introduction, as well as the range and number of poets and writings that he included in his anthology, made the collection an impressive display of black verse. Henderson's lengthy introduction details the operations of the poetry in a formal, academic style, and rather than limit his discussion to only those poems composed during the 1960s and early 1970s, Henderson makes connections between black verse of the 1960s and earlier traditions of African American poetry. He also discusses verbal forms such as blues lyrics, folk poetry, and street poetry in order to suggest the "continuity and the wholeness of the Black Poetic tradition in the United States."¹⁶

To redress the systematic misunderstandings of African American poetry by literary critics, on the one hand, and to draw attention to the connections between the written and the oral, on the other hand, Henderson offers a "critical framework, an organizing principle, other than chronology" (3). Although scholars have debated the merits of Henderson's theories, few studies have discussed how the organizational features of his anthology influenced views of black poetry. Yet his editorial organizing, which links a wide range of poets, contributes to the visibility of his theories. The inclusion of such a diverse body of poets spanning generations displays the interconnections between writers, as well as expressive forms, and the arrangement of the selections in Henderson's anthology stands as a case in point to his theories.

Henderson's book opens with a seventy-page introduction, and the contents are organized into three sections. Section 1, "Pre-Harlem Renaissance and Soul-Field," contains Georgia Sea Island songs; folk rhymes; "The Judgment Day," by James Weldon Johnson; and poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar. Section 2, "The Harlem Renaissance and Afterward, Soul-Field," includes blues lyrics; poems by well-known figures of the New Negro era such as Hughes and Countee Cullen; and works by writers who came to prominence during the 1930s and 1940s, including Margaret Walker Alexander, Gwendolyn Brooks, Melvin Tolson, and Robert Hayden. The final and largest segment, "The New Black Consciousness, the Same Difference," consists of street poetry by H. Rap Brown and Reginald Butler and poems by Baraka, Madhubuti, Sanchez, Larry Neal, Carolyn Rodgers, and several other poets associated with black arts discourse.

Henderson's book presents the similarities between black poetry of the 1960s and 1970s and previous generations of writers, vernacular forms, and music by displaying a dynamic assortment of established and emergent poets. Placing Madhubuti, Giovanni, Carolyn Rodgers, and several other younger poets of the era in concert with Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, and Paul Laurence Dunbar allowed Henderson to emphasize the *continuity* of the black poetic tradition. For Henderson, that tradition was composed not only of conventional literary works of art. His inclusion of song lyrics and street raps suggests that in order to understand the New Black Poetry, readers and scholars must consider a long history of black multigenre expressive forms—expressive forms informed by literature and music. Henderson's decision to include song lyrics in his anthology, as well as Dudley Randall's inclusion of spirituals in his anthology *The Black Poets*, anticipated the wide and regular practice among contemporary anthologists of presenting spirituals and song lyrics in literature collections.

The organization of Henderson's anthology also functions to present a view that the New Black Poets are more unified than they are fragmented. On the one hand, the poets featured in the third section comprise a diverse group of writers, but Henderson purposely downplays the differences among the poets in order to present the idea that "despite its variety the poetry of the sixties is informed and unified by the new consciousness of Blackness" (183). Henderson does not offer an extensive explanation of exactly what constitutes the new consciousness of blackness. Actually, he could exercise more flexibility regarding what poets and poems he could include in the section by avoiding a strict definition

of exactly what that new consciousness entails. Rather than offer a precise and inevitably limited definition, Henderson reveals his view of the new consciousness by presenting a range of selections to readers. In fact, his eclectic selections disrupt conventional notions about what constitutes poetry.

A number of the “poems” in *Understanding the New Black Poetry* are not always identified as poems. The inclusion of Georgia Sea Island songs, folk rhymes, blues lyrics, and street poetry in the anthology enables Henderson to reveal that black musical forms could be presented and read as poetry. In his introduction, he also explains how music operates as a poetic reference in poetry, and he identifies at least ten ways that black music informs African American poetry, noting that the methods poets utilize to draw on music include generalized references to songs, song titles, quotations from songs, adaptations of song forms, tonal memories as poetic structure, musical notations in texts, emotional responses incorporated into poems, the figure of the musician as subject/poem/history/myth, language from jazz life, and poems as musical score or chart (47). To support his claims, Henderson offers examples from the poems included in his anthology for each of the categories (46–61).

Henderson further promotes the musicality of black poetry through his choice of selections. Several of the poems in *Understanding the New Black Poetry* focus on music and musicians. Percy Johnson’s “Round ’Bout Midnight, Opus 17,” Le Roy Stone’s “Flamenco Sketches,” Lance Jeffers’s “How High the Moon,” Sarah Webster Fabio’s “Tribute to Duke,” Sonia Sanchez’s “a/coltrane/poem,” Nikki Giovanni’s “Revolutionary Music,” Larry Neal’s “Don’t Say Goodbye to the Pork-Pie Hat,” Etheridge Knight’s “To Dinah Washington,” Haki Madhubuti’s “Don’t Cry, Scream,” and Sharon Bourke’s “Sopranosound, Memory of John” are among the many poems in the book that focus on black music and musicians. Henderson goes well beyond simply compiling a collection of poems and instead offers a framework for comprehending New Black Poetry, publishing a large number of poems that correspond to African American music. He also encourages his readers to pay attention to the musicality and orality of black verse, as well as the connections between contemporary poetry and a long-standing black poetic tradition.

The designs of *For Malcolm*, *Black Fire*, and *Understanding the New Black Poetry* oriented audiences to the prominence of a nationalist ethos of African American poetry. The titles, arrangement of selections, and

introductions of these collections, and the popularity of the contributors, shaped views of African American verse and emphasized the connections among contemporary poets, black radical politics, and a variety of expressive traditions, including African American speech and music. *For Malcolm*, *Black Fire*, and *Understanding the New Black Poetry* were certainly not the only anthologies that played a role in shaping the New Black Poetry. Actually, it was the collective work of several editors and the circulation of so many anthologies that ensured the vibrant production of black poetry and the increased visibility of poets during the 1960s. Indeed, the collections made African American poetry, not to mention folklore, spirituals, and various other black expressive forms, available to large numbers of readers.

The Shape of Black Arts Anthologies

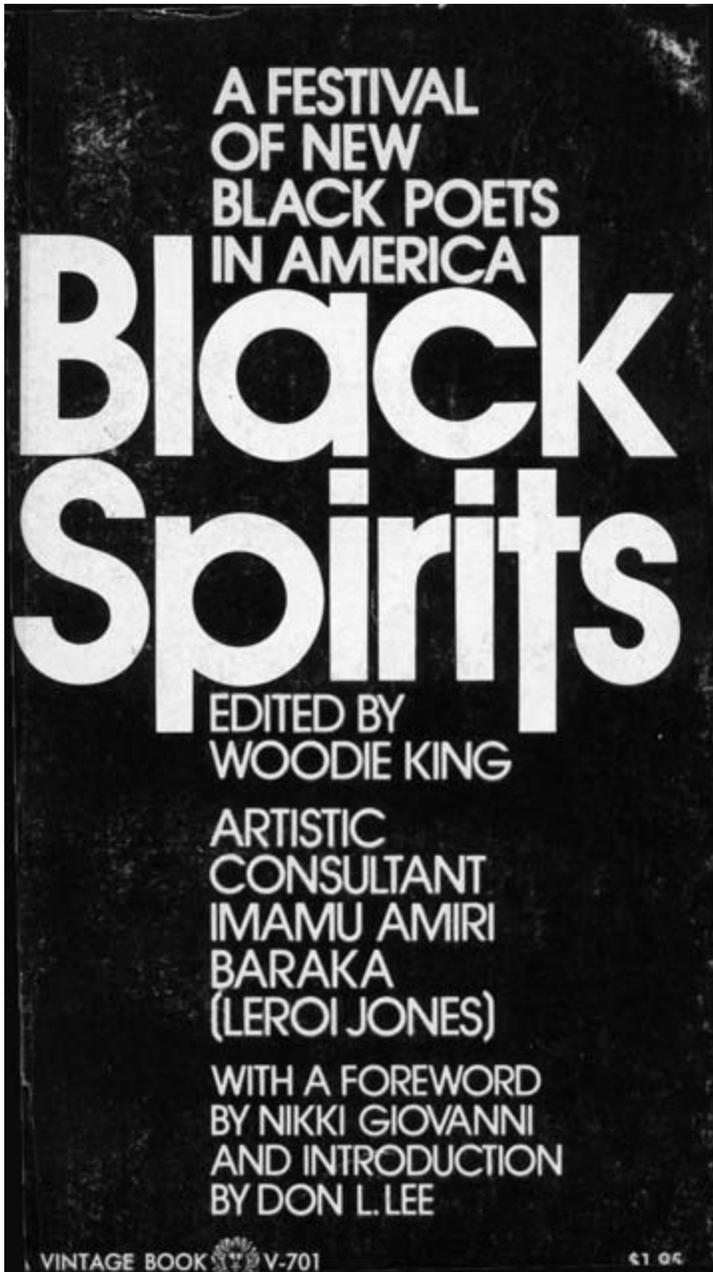
Editors provided readers with views of the era's major poets and dominant types of African American poetry, often featuring leading poets in comprehensive anthologies. Houston Baker's *Black Literature in America* (1971), Dudley Randall's *The Black Poets* (1971), Richard Barksdale and Kenneth Kinnamon's *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology* (1972), and Arnold Adoff's *The Poetry of Black America: Anthology of the 20th Century* (1973) contain selections by Nikki Giovanni, Etheridge Knight, Haki Madhubuti, and Sonia Sanchez, among others. Editors situated relatively young poets within the continuum of African American literature by including their works in collections along with older generations of writers. Poems by Phillis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon appear early in Barksdale and Kinnamon's *Black Writers of America*, and toward the end of the collection, the anthology presents poems by Haki Madhubuti, Sonia Sanchez, and Nikki Giovanni. Anthologizing emergent poets in collections designed for classroom use helped solidify places for the writers in the canon of African American literature.

Academic anthologies and anthologists often function to assign or reinscribe literary value. Unlike *Black Fire*, which labels its contents as "writings," Baker's collection, as well as Barksdale and Kinnamon's, presents its contributions as "literature." In addition to offering a venue for a wide display of works by a group of writers, editors often provide introductions and background information in order to define poets' place in literary history and perhaps encourage readers to seek out more expansive presentations of the poets' work. In "The Present Generation:

Since 1945” section of their anthology, Barksdale and Kinnamon explain that “four relatively young Black poets who have been introduced, with remarkably provocative results, by Dudley Randall’s Broadside Press are Don L. Lee [Haki Madhubuti], Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and Etheridge Knight. Rarely has a group of Black poets had such a constructively emotional impact on the collective racial ego of Black America, particularly the youth of Black America.”¹⁷ The anthology only includes one poem apiece by Giovanni and Sanchez and two poems each by Knight and Madhubuti. Perhaps the explanation that these four poets appeal to audiences, especially “the youth of Black America,” was intended to prompt readers to consider the writers’ significance beyond the small number of poems with which they are represented in the anthology. Interestingly, *Black Writers of America* hardly displays the range of the four writers’ literary talents. Readers are made aware of the poets’ significance based on how the editors describe them, more so than by the presentation of their actual poems.

Editors regularly included writings by Nikki Giovanni, Etheridge Knight, Haki Madhubuti, Larry Neal, Carolyn Rodgers, and Sonia Sanchez, as well as the work of elder writers Gwendolyn Brooks and Dudley Randall. And of course, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) was one of the most recognizable and recurring names to appear in African American anthologies of the era, notwithstanding some regional collections. On the one hand, editors assisted these writers by making their names and poetry available to readers. At the same time, anthologists relied on the name recognition of Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Haki Madhubuti, and other popular poets to appeal to the interests of their readership. The cover of Woodie King’s *Black Spirits: A Festival of New Black Poets in America* suggests how an anthology might utilize popular black poets to draw reader interest. On the front of *Black Spirits*, in addition to providing the title and editor’s name, the cover of the book announces, “ARTISTIC CONSULTANT IMAMU AMIRI BARAKA / WITH A FOREWORD / BY NIKKI GIOVANNI / AND INTRODUCTION / BY DON L. LEE.” In 1972, when *Black Spirits* was published, Giovanni, Baraka, and Madhubuti (Lee) were among the most popular writers associated with the Black Arts Movement. Placing these three prominent poets on the cover of a book would definitely appeal to the interests of a black readership and add to that publication’s credibility.

Anthologists also assisted in shaping the contours of black poetry by publishing a common group of poets and certain kinds of poems. The editors seemed less interested in anthologizing poems focusing on na-



Paperback cover of Woodie King's anthology *Black Spirits*, showcasing the names of Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti).

ture and forms of experimental poetry. Poems offering critiques of anti-black racism, poems paying tribute to black political figures and musicians, and poems celebrating various aspects of African American culture appeared far more regularly in the anthologies. Featuring these kinds of poems may have left the movement open to charges from some critics that poets of the era did not produce a diverse array of African American poetry. Nonetheless, the publication of a select group of writers and certain types of poems contributed to the view of a politicized movement among poets who were seeking to appeal to an African American readership. Popularizing a group of poets and their style of poetry required that anthologists publish them over and over again. Moreover, the appearance of a core group of writers in various anthologies advanced the idea that they were contributors to a common endeavor.

That anthologists published a fairly overlapping group of black poets did not mean that all the anthologies were the same. In order to distinguish their collections among the several other anthologies being published, some editors found ways to diversify their texts and offer creative arrangements of the selected works. June Jordan's *soulscript: Afro-American Poetry* (1970), Lindsay Patterson's *A Rock against the Wind: Black Love Poems* (1973), and Arnold Adoff's *My Black Me: A Beginning Book of Black Poetry* serve as notable examples. Consistent with a recurring technique presented in poetry during the era, even the title of Jordan's anthology is written in lower-case. The title *soulscript* and the lower-case presentation of the term alert readers to the African American and poetic ethos utilized by the editor June Jordan and her book's contents.

Jordan's collection is designed thematically and thus exposes the commonalities among a range of black poets, including Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Amiri Baraka. Jordan introduces each of the seven sections of the collection with a short poem that describes the kinds of poems that appear in that segment. The opening section, "tomorrow words today," includes poems by poets between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one, including two emerging writers, Gayl Jones and Julia Alvarez. Today, both Jones and Alvarez are more widely known as critically acclaimed novelists; their contributions to *soulscript* mark one of the few times that their poetry has appeared in an anthology of poetry. Jordan's book may have given the two writers their first national exposure. It is a testament to Jordan's commitment to publishing "new" writers that she included young and emergent poets in *soulscript* and that she also opened the collection with their writings.

The second section of Jordan's book, "all about the always first,"

focuses on “poems to the parents, the children, / the brothers and the sisters.”¹⁸ The third section, “hero hymns and heroines,” contains tribute poems (35). Next, “corners on the curving sky,” the fourth section, addresses “philosophy; / they reveal the corners where we organize what we know” (57). The selections in the fifth section, “saying the person,” are first-person or “special I-Am” poems (83). The sixth section, “black eyes on a fallowland,” features poems that bear witness to the struggles that black people face in America (101). Finally, in the seventh section, “attitudes of soul,” Jordan announces, “Let these last poems sure commune / our impulse to the hourly / flourishing of soul” (117). Organizing her book thematically as opposed to chronologically allows Jordan to demonstrate the idea that black poets from across the twentieth century addressed similar topics in their writings. Despite the generational differences between Jean Toomer and Sonia Sanchez, or between Countee Cullen and Larry Neal, their writings nonetheless appear in the same sections in Jordan’s anthology. Ultimately, *soulscript* advanced the black arts enterprise of publishing a common group of African American poets.

Lindsay Patterson’s *A Rock against the Wind: Black Love Poems* represents another unique collection that features black arts writings. Although many black poets were primarily known for their fiery poetry, the selections printed in Patterson’s collection reveal that African American poets had a tradition of writing about love as well. Like Jordan’s book, Patterson’s anthology is divided into sections and includes poems by a range of poets who published across the twentieth century. The collection includes poems by older and established poets Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Georgia Douglass Johnson, Helen Johnson, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, as well as poems by New Black Poets, including Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Haki Madhubuti, June Jordan, Etheridge Knight, Quincy Troupe, and Carolyn Rodgers. Patterson arranges the poems in the collection into ten categories: “The Joys of Love,” “A Hymn to Black Men and Women,” “To Be a Woman,” “Advice/Wisdom,” “Love Is Hell,” “Revenge, Regret, Rejection,” “Seduction,” “Reflections of Love Lost,” “Love and Death,” and “For Love to Survive.” *A Rock against the Wind* may have been an anomaly among African American anthologies in terms of its focus. Even so, Patterson’s book provides an example of how the organizing principles of an anthology could bring attention to a less visible interest among African American poets in writing about love and relationships.

Although some poets have been criticized for being dismissive or

unaware of earlier generations of black writers, anthologists actually evidenced broad conceptions of what constituted African American literature. Henderson's *Understanding the New Black Poetry*, Jordan's *soulscript*, Patterson's *A Rock against the Wind*, and Arnold Adoff's *The Poetry of Black America*, among others, all include elder African American writers. Anthologists reprinted the poems of older generations of writers in contemporary collections and kept those writers in print and exposed a new generation of readers to their writings. Moreover, anthologists pinpointed the connections between previous generations of writers and emergent poets. The process of anthologizing poetry served to socialize poets and poems among a range of African American categories and topics, and the appearance of varied poets in anthologies revealed a diversity of black voices.

Editors who anthologized emergent poets also reprinted poems by such historically significant poets as Phillis Wheatley, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes. Thus, editors produced an expanded view of the black poetic tradition and also differentiated their own views of poetry from those of some of the leading poets of the era. Even though younger militant poets may have distanced themselves from the Eurocentric style present in the writings of Wheatley, editors ensured that her poems remained in circulation during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Anthologists included Wheatley's poems in such collections as *An Introduction to Black Literature in America from 1746 to the Present* (1968), *Black American Literature: Poetry* (1969), *3000 Years of Black Poetry* (1970), *The Black Poets* (1971), and *Black Writers of America* (1972).

Admittedly, many editors included a relatively small sampling of Wheatley's work, and the editors who published her poetry tended to be elder writers and critics such as Dudley Randall and Darwin Turner. Nonetheless, the regular appearance of Wheatley's writings in anthologies that also featured the New Black Poetry disrupts unqualified claims that participants in the Black Arts Movement had a total disregard for Wheatley's poetry. For instance, Henry Louis Gates Jr. holds that black arts figures were a "more hostile group" to Wheatley than the whites who interrogated her in 1772.¹⁹ The stylistic and political ideologies that informed the poetry of Amiri Baraka, Haki Madhubuti, Jayne Cortez, and Sonia Sanchez may have been at odds with the writings of Phillis Wheatley. However, Darwin Turner, Dudley Randall, William H. Robinson, Richard Long, and Eugenia Collier, among others, chose to reprint her poems in their anthologies, revealing that not all black arts figures were as hostile to Wheatley as Gates suggests.

Anthologists of the era further established Paul Laurence Dunbar's place in the canon of African American literature by frequently reprinting his poems "We Wear the Mask" and "Sympathy." Interestingly, these two poems do not contain specific racialized words. Their regular appearance in racialized sites or African American contexts, however, increased the likelihood that the poems would be interpreted as addressing black interests. In addition, the publication of Dunbar's "dialect" poems corresponded to the African American vernacular English presented in the writings of several modern black poets. On the one hand, the appearance of Dunbar's work in collections that featured contemporary black poetry exposed readers to the long-standing practice among African American poets of utilizing black vernacular in their writings. At the same time, the appearance of poems by Dunbar, Haki Madhubuti, and Carolyn Rodgers in common publishing venues exposed readers to diverse representations of African American vernacular speech.

Anthologizing the poetry of Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Countee Cullen in collections that also included poems by contemporary poets allowed editors to underscore the relationship between the New Negro Movement and the New Black Poetry. No poet from previous generations appeared as regularly as Langston Hughes. The publication of Hughes and other historically significant poets together with contemporary African American poets was an important and rare undertaking for mass-market anthologies. The setup of such collections revealed that the black arts enterprise was not a spontaneous movement, but rather the extension of an established and viable literary tradition. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and even Phillis Wheatley were as likely to appear on the table of contents pages of African American anthologies as were Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Haki Madhubuti. As a result, anthologists demonstrated that the reclamation of an older generation of poets was an integral step in the presentation of New Black Poetry.

As an editor, publisher, and poet, Dudley Randall was an essential connector for varied aspects of black poetry. On the one hand, Randall's poems appeared in several anthologies of the era, including *Kaleidoscope* (1967), *Black Voices* (1968), *Black Poetry* (1969), *Black American Literature* (1970), *The Black Poets* (1971), *New Black Voices* (1972), *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (1973), and *Giant Talk: An Anthology of Third World Writings* (1975). At the same time, Randall facilitated—as an editor or publisher—the production of a number of notable anthologies, including *For Malcolm* (1967), *Black Poetry* (1969), *The Black Poets*

(1971), *Jump Bad* (1971), and *A Broadside Treasury* (1971). As an elder poet and editor, Randall demonstrated commitment to publishing both older and younger writers, and the anthologies that he edited and published include a diverse array of poets.

Even when Randall published his work with a large mainstream press, as was the case with his anthology *The Black Poets*, he maintained a strong interest in making readers aware of African American publishing institutions. At the end of the collection, Randall includes a listing that contains publishers of black poetry, periodicals that published African American poetry, volumes of poetry, and audio and video recordings of poets reading their work. Although *The Black Poets* was published by a white-owned press, Randall's presentation of contact information for publishers and periodicals of black poetry directed readers to various African American sites. In other words, Randall utilized a white publishing institution as a platform to alert readers to the existence of a network of black literary spaces.

The anthologies Randall edited, coedited, published, and appeared in served as sites for the display of a chorus of black poetic voices. Randall's involvement with the publication of a variety of poets and African American literary art was a testament to his wide-ranging roles as an editor, publisher, and advocate for black verse. Randall's collections and, more broadly, African American anthologies containing poetry could be utilized to promote emergent poets and simultaneously make contemporary readers aware of literary and expressive forms that preceded the Black Arts Movement, such as the blues and spirituals. Anthologists such as Dudley Randall, Stephen Henderson, and June Jordan published the work of both younger and older generations of writers, providing a broad and diverse view of African American poetry. The publication of several anthologies featuring black poetry during the era confirmed Randall's belief "that in the house of poetry there are many mansions" and that "we can enjoy different poets for the variety and uniqueness of their poetry, not because they are all of a sameness."²⁰ Showcasing a range of poets in common sites further instilled the sense of solidarity among African American poets of the time period.

Anthologizing Nikki Giovanni and Inscribing Signature Poems

Taken together, anthologists of black verse served as vital facilitators for the presentation of a large body of poetry. Nonetheless, editorial

work is, by definition, selective and a form of commodification. In comparison to the number of poems that appeared in individual volumes of poetry and the poets who published in magazines, anthologies presented a relatively condensed view of the African American poems composed during the 1960s and 1970s. By favoring certain types of poetic styles and particular poets over various others, the editorial organizing enacted by anthologists prompted distinct ideas about what constituted black poetry. To the extent that anthologies are more regularly available to readerships across time than individual volumes of poetry, collections often shape initial encounters between poets and wide audiences. In addition, more so than any individual volume of poetry, anthologists constructed ideas about how a group of poets appear in relation to each other and to a tradition of African American and American literature.

Even though editors published a range of emergent writers, they seemed to have a special affinity for Nikki Giovanni. Between 1968 and 1974, Giovanni's poems were published in over twenty anthologies. Although anthologists tended to publish more male than female poets, the frequency with which Giovanni's poems appeared made her a notable exception. The widespread circulation of Giovanni's poetry was especially remarkable considering she was not closely associated with activist and artistic organizations or high-profile writers, as was the case with Amiri Baraka and Haki Madhubuti. Baraka, for example, was often promoted as the movement's leading figure and in fact had a distinguished literary reputation before the Black Arts Movement, which helped explain why editors favored his work for their collections. Madhubuti's close ties to Dudley Randall's Broadside Press, Hoyt Fuller's *Negro Digest/Black World*, and Chicago's OBAC group, not to mention the endorsements he received from his mentor Gwendolyn Brooks, all helped account for why a range of editors would include Madhubuti in anthologies. Giovanni, on the other hand, had relatively few direct ties to activist and artistic organizations. Nonetheless, editors routinely selected her work for inclusion.

The frequency with which certain poets were anthologized reveals how editors could influence the value placed on particular poets by devoting more space to the publication of their poems. For example, a larger number of poems by Nikki Giovanni, Amiri Baraka, and Haki Madhubuti appeared in anthologies than the number of poems by Johari Amini, Askia Toure, and Larry Neal, even though all these writers were considered militant black poets. The frequent appearance of Gio-

vanni's poems in collections confirmed and extended her prominence in the discourse. Editors shaped and were influenced by conceptions of Giovanni as a leading poet; they consistently selected her poetry for inclusion. As a result, Giovanni became a fixture in anthologies of African American verse.

In addition to influencing the value and visibility placed on Giovanni and a few other select poets by regularly anthologizing their work, editors also helped determine what might be seen as these poets' representative or signature poems by repeatedly reprinting poets' select pieces in various collections. Giovanni's "Nikki-Rosa," which appeared in approximately fourteen collections between 1969 and 1974, seemed to be a preferred selection of editors. The poem initially appeared in Giovanni's second volume of poetry, *Black Judgment* (1968), published by Broadside Press. The poem catalogs negative and positive "childhood remembrances" such as living in a house "with no inside toilet" and experiencing "how happy you were to have your mother all to yourself." It contains such striking observations as "though you're poor it isn't poverty that concerns you," and "I really hope no white person ever has cause to write about me because they never understand Black love is Black wealth."²¹ The poem's exploration of conflicting childhood memories, rejection of white biographers, and appraisal of "Black love" may have all contributed to its wide appeal. Editors' continuous reprinting of the poem established "Nikki-Rosa" as Giovanni's signature poem. Actually, a number of Giovanni's poems, including "For Saundra," "My Poem," and "The True Import of Present Dialogue: Black vs. Negro," express the nationalist sensibilities often promoted by nationalist activists and militant black poets. Accordingly, to a slightly lesser degree than "Nikki-Rosa," those three poems are among Giovanni's most anthologized pieces as well.

The regular publication of a few select poems by a poet in various anthologies amounts to a kind of communal affirmation of what presumably constitutes the poet's representative work. The establishment of a signature poem signals a collective and continuing interest, if not commitment, on the part of an audience in keeping a poet's particular ideas visible. A poem's steady inclusion in collections both reflects and generates the poem's popular value; a widely anthologized poem apparently circulates among a larger audience and subsequent anthologists. Moreover, the recurring appearance of a poem in anthologies inscribes that particular verse more deeply onto the pages of literary history and thus secures a more definite place for the poem and poet within a dis-

course. The wide circulation of “Nikki-Rosa” may have given Giovanni a special edge over fellow emergent poets without signature poems.

Sonia Sanchez and Carolyn Rodgers were comparably popular women poets to Giovanni, writings by all three often appearing in the same anthologies. Yet no single poem by Sanchez or Rodgers enjoyed the active circulation of Giovanni’s “Nikki-Rosa.” Sanchez and Rodgers certainly received widespread coverage during the era; however, anthologists were not as consistent in their common selection of a particular poem by those two poets as they were with Giovanni’s poem. Giovanni’s signature poem distinguished her from other notable women poets. More broadly, since Giovanni had a signature and recognizable poem, she was in relatively rare company among all poets. Indeed, when poets are anthologized over a long period of time, they are often represented by a relatively select sampling of their work. Signature poems operate as placeholders for authors’ positions within literary history. Poets without widely received signature poems are often left outside of canons.

In addition to Giovanni’s “Nikki-Rosa,” editors regularly published Etheridge Knight’s “The Idea of Ancestry” and “It Was a Funky Deal”; Haki Madhubuti’s “But He Was Cool”; and Amiri Baraka’s “Black Art,” “A Poem for Black Hearts,” and “Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note.” Similar to “Nikki-Rosa,” Knight’s “The Idea of Ancestry” and Baraka’s “Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note” display distinct autobiographical elements. On the one hand, poets’ signature poems often overshadow their less published verse. At the same time, however, signature poems function to provide a more distinct image of the writer’s poetic sensibilities and perhaps the writer’s persona. The broad circulation of Baraka’s “A Poem for Black Hearts,” which pays tribute to Malcolm X as well as his “Black Art,” confirms the poet’s reputation as a strong proponent of black radical views. The title of Giovanni’s “Nikki-Rosa” carries her first name, and the content of the poem is seemingly autobiographical, thus suggesting how the increased circulation of this signature poem assisted in amplifying a view of the poet’s life. Indeed, “Nikki-Rosa” embeds and projects an image of Nikki Giovanni. “Nikki-Rosa” remains one of Giovanni’s most unforgettable poems in large part because anthologists continually remembered to include the poem in their collections.

Although “Nikki-Rosa” apparently testifies to Giovanni’s personal childhood experiences, the poem reverberates in the larger discourse of African American poetry. The poem’s affirmation of African American

life and culture and its contempt for white interpretations of black life parallel several other widely circulating poems during the time period. Similar to “Nikki-Rosa,” Sterling Brown’s “Strong Men,” Lance Jeffers’s “My Blackness Is the Beauty of This Land,” and Mari Evans’s “I Am a Black Woman” and “Vive Noir” reflect images that project black people and culture as containing much strength. To varying degrees, the defiance of white culture expressed in Langston Hughes’s “I, Too, Sing America” and Amiri Baraka’s “Black Art,” among others, appears in Giovanni’s poem as well. And certainly Giovanni’s rejection of white biographers/critics relates directly to the sentiments expressed by Hoyt Fuller, Haki Madhubuti, and other artists and commentators who were interested in formulating a black aesthetic. The relationship between Giovanni’s poem and multiple ideas in black culture may have accounted for “Nikki-Rosa”’s popular appeal among anthologists.

The efforts of numerous editors to anthologize select groups of poets and poems attests to the defining role of editorial work in the process of keeping particular poems circulating among readers. Anthologies served as visible platforms for showcasing emergent writers such as Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, and Haki Madhubuti. Anthologies also served as powerful sites of recovery and renewal, providing elder writers with opportunities to present new and older works. The frequent publication of Gwendolyn Brooks’s and Margaret Walker’s poems in anthologies of the era solidified these two poets’ stature in literary history, especially among African American readerships. Although Brooks and Walker had achieved recognition for their poetry in previous decades, anthologies of the 1960s and 1970s extended the circulation of their poems and greatly influenced what became the poets’ signature poems.

Walker first gained national attention for her poetry during the 1940s with the publication of her volume of poetry *For My People* (1942). The volume’s title poem, “For My People,” articulates a collective call to African Americans everywhere, including those “singing their slave songs repeatedly,” those “walking blindly spreading joy, losing time / being lazy, sleeping when hungry, shouting when / burdened,” those “noting struggles with adversity and making a call for change,” and those “blundering and groping and floundering in the dark of churches and schools and clubs and societies, associations and councils and committees and conventions, distressed and disturbed and deceived and devoured by money-hungry glory-craving leeches.” In the last stanza, the narrator calls on “my people” to “Let a new earth rise. Let another

world be born. Let a bloody peace be written in the sky,” to “Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now rise and take control.”

Critic Melba Boyd explains that Walker’s poem, “with its terse imagery, riveting, rhythmical phrasing, and thematic embrace of the black masses, anticipates the aesthetics of the Black Arts Movement.”²² Consequently, during the 1960s and 1970s, editors seemed particularly fond of including Walker’s poem in their collections. The poem appeared in more than twenty-five collections between 1968 and 1974, making it one of the most anthologized African American poems of the era. The frequent publication of “For My People” made the poem a mainstay in black arts discourse decades after the poem’s initial appearance. Anthologies established “For My People” as Walker’s most recognizable poem.

Walker’s “For My People” corresponded, at various levels, to strong interests among poets and editors celebrating black culture. On the one hand, Walker’s poem related to previous generations of poets such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes. At the same time, the poem’s characterizations of African American culture and its affirmation of black people relate to the poetry of Haki Madhubuti, Nikki Giovanni, Henry Dumas, and Sonia Sanchez, to mention only a few. The recurring phrase “for my people” in Walker’s poem definitely connected to the distinct nationalist ethos so prevalent during the 1960s. The appearance of “For My People” in so many anthologies is not surprising, since the poem was quite compatible with the communal spirit expressed by emergent black poets.

During the same time period that Walker’s “For My People” circulated, Gwendolyn Brooks’s “We Real Cool” appeared in at least sixteen anthologies, providing the poem with renewed interest among readers. Brooks’s poem actually corresponds to at least two recurrent themes in contemporary black poetry, namely the representation of hip young men and the implication that coolness—for better and worse—is a noteworthy feature of their cultural identity. Giovanni’s “Beautiful Black Men,” Calvin Hernton’s “Jitterbugging in the Streets,” Bobb Hamilton’s “Brother Harlem Bedford Watts Tells Mr. Charlie Where It’s At,” and Larry Neal’s “Don’t Say Goodbye to the Pork-Pie Hat,” to name a few, all focus on cool black men and the resonance of African American fashionable cultural expressions. Most notably, Madhubuti’s “But He Was Cool” echoes Brooks’s poem by highlighting the negative consequences of coolness. In his poem, Madhubuti describes a “super-

cool / ultrablack” man who wears tailor-made dashikis but who is unfortunately too cool to comprehend the rising heat of black radicalism. Editors frequently anthologized “We Real Cool” and in the process highlighted Brooks’s connections to the concerns of a younger generation. As they had done with Giovanni’s “Nikki-Rosa” and Walker’s “For My People,” anthologists established “We Real Cool” as Brooks’s signature poem.

Anthologists collectively established tribute poems as a kind of signature mode of poetry during the era. Tribute poems celebrating the lives and legacies of Malcolm X, Frederick Douglass, John Coltrane, Billie Holiday, and Harriet Tubman were especially prevalent. The frequent appearance in anthologies of poems paying tribute to black historical figures allowed editors to advance the objective among African Americans of recovering a usable past. That is, tribute poems extol the virtues of black historical figures and provided current readers with examples of how they might lead their lives. Furthermore, the tribute poems offer striking and positive images of black people and culture in general. As mentioned earlier, Robert Hayden’s “Frederick Douglass” was one of the most anthologized poems of the 1960s and 1970s. Editors also, to a lesser degree, included tributes to Frederick Douglass by Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes. The anthologies contain tribute poems lauding historical figures composed by past and current poets and thus display an apparent shared interest among generations of writers in celebrating black heroes in verse.

The methods and regularity with which African American poetry was anthologized make us more aware of the defining role of editorial work in the production of black arts poetry and the increased visibility of poets. Anthologies showcased and consolidated the major trends and figures in African American poetry of the era by repeatedly publishing a common group of poems and poets. Collections such as *For Malcolm* and *Black Fire* underscored the poets’ preoccupations with nationalist and black musical sensibilities, while anthologies such as *The Black Poets* and *Understanding the New Black Poetry* oriented readers to the existence of long-standing traditions of black poetry and related expressive forms. Anthologies made the poetry of Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, and Margaret Walker widely available to readers, and the editors of these collections assisted in establishing these poets’ signature poems. Because of their influential authority in designating literary value and keeping a select group of poems and poets in print, anthologies operated as central forces in the formulation of a canon of black poetry.