Best African American Fiction 2010

Stories

The Ariran’s Last Life
By Maria Eliza Hamilton Abegunde

Maria Eliza Hamilton Abegunde is a poet, novelist, teacher, artist-in-residence, Reiki Master, and student of Ifa whose work focuses on recovering the lost voices of the Middle Passage through cellular memory. Writing is the way she articulates her findings. Her work has been published in numerous anthologies and journals, including Beyond the Frontier: African-American Poetry for the 21st Century; Knowing Stones: Poems of Exotic Places; Jane’s Stories II; nocturnes (re)view of literary arts; and rhino. She is also the author of three chapbooks of poetry: What Is Now Unanswerable; Still Breathing; and Wishful Thinking. She is the recipient of awards and fellowships, including those from Cave Canem, Ragdale, and the Sacatar Foundation. She is the national coordinator for Peacemakers Make Poetry and is a member of the UNESCO Core Team on the Slave Route Project. (From National Black Herstory Task Force, http://www.blackherstory.com/conferencesessions03/session1.html)

Three Letters, One Song and A Refrain
By Chris Abani

http://www.chrisabani.com/

Chris Abani's prose includes Song For Night (Akashic, 2007), The Virgin of Flames (Penguin, 2007), Becoming Abigail (Akashic, 2006), GraceLand (FSG, 2004), and Masters of the Board (Delta, 1985). His poetry collections are Hands Washing Water (Copper Canyon, 2006), Dog Woman (Red Hen, 2004), Daphne's Lot (Red Hen, 2003), and Kalakuta Republic (Saqi, 2001). He is a Professor at the University of California, Riverside and the recipient of the PEN USA Freedom-to-Write Award, the Prince Claus Award, a Lannan Literary Fellowship, a California Book Award, a Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, a PEN Beyond the Margins Award & the PEN Hemingway Book Prize.

The Headstrong Historian
By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria, the fifth of six children to Igbo parents. Chimamanda completed her secondary education at the University of Nigeria’s school, receiving several academic prizes. She went on to study medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. During this period, she edited The Compass, a magazine run by the University's Catholic medical students. She gained a scholarship to study communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia for two years, and she went on to pursue a degree in communication and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University. At the moment, Chimamanda divides her time between Nigeria and the United States. She was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University during the 2005-2006 academic year, and is now pursuing graduate work in the African Studies program at Yale University.
**Bread and the Land**  
By Jeffery Renard Allen  

Dr. Jeffery Renard Allen is a graduate of the doctorate program in creative writing at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the author of *Harbors and Spirits* (Moyer Bell, 1999), a collection of poems, and the novel *Rails Under My Back* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), which won the Chicago Tribune's Heartland Prize for Fiction. His other writing awards include: The 21st Century Award Chicago Public Library, The John Farrar Fellow - Bread Loaf Writer’s Conference 2001 and The P.E.N Discovery Prize-1989. A writer who believes in the power of teaching, he works at Queens College, the New School for Social Research, and is presently a fellow at the New York Public Library's Center for Scholars and Writers. (From Spectrum of Poetic Fire, [http://www.spectrumofpoeticfire.com/Reader%20Directory/Jeffrey_Renard_Allen.htm](http://www.spectrumofpoeticfire.com/Reader%20Directory/Jeffrey_Renard_Allen.htm))

**Body and Soul**  
By Wesley Brown

Wesley Brown is the author of two published novels, *Tragic Magic* and *Darktown Strutters*, and a novel in manuscript, *Push Comes to Shove*. His plays, *Boogie Woogie and Booker T.; Life During Wartime; A Prophet Among Them*; and most recently, *The Murderess*, have been produced in New York and around the country. He has co-edited two anthologies of multicultural American writing, *Imagining America* and *Visions of America*. He holds an MA in creative writing and literature from The City College, CUNY, and since 1979, he has taught creative writing, American literature, and drama at Rutgers University. (From Rutgers University, [http://english.rutgers.edu/news_events/war/calendar/0405/wbrowne.html](http://english.rutgers.edu/news_events/war/calendar/0405/wbrowne.html))

**Night Coming**  
By Desiree Cooper

Detroit Free Press columnist Desiree Cooper has been twice-nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. She has won national prizes for her fiction and is a founding member of the African American poetry program, Cave Canem. Her stories have been collected in *Children of the Dream; Other People’s Skin: Four Novellas*; and *Detroit Noir*. Cooper is currently co-host of Weekend America, along with Bill Radke. She has contributed national commentaries to NPR’s *All Things Considered* and has appeared frequently on Detroit-area radio and television. Cooper was born in Itazuke, Japan, and has lived in seven U.S. states. She graduated magna cum laude in journalism and economics from the University of Maryland and received her law degree from the University of Virginia.

**Ghosts**  
By Edwidge Danticat

Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti and moved to the United States when she was twelve. She is the author of several books, including *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, an Oprah Book Club selection; *Krik? Krak!*, a National Book Award finalist; and *The Farming of Bones*, an American Book
Award winner. She is also the editor of *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* and *The Beacon Best of 2000: Great Writing by Men and Women of All Colors and Cultures*. Danticat earned a degree in French Literature from Barnard College, where she won the 1995 Woman of Achievement Award, and later an MFA from Brown University. She lives in Miami with her husband and daughter. (From AALBC.com, [http://aalbc.com/authors/edwidge.htm](http://aalbc.com/authors/edwidge.htm))

**Been Meaning to Say**
By Amina Gautier

Amina Gautier is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Washington University in St. Louis and Assistant Professor of English at Saint Joseph’s University. More than forty-five of her stories have been published, appearing in *Callaloo, Kenyon Review, North American Review, Shenandoah, Southwest Review, Storyquarterly*, and *Sycamore Review* among other places in addition to being anthologized in *The Sincerest Form of Flattery: Contemporary Women Writers on Forerunners in Fiction; The Best 20 Years of Notre Dame Review*; and *New Stories from the South: The Year’s Best, 2008*. Her work has been honored with scholarships and fellowships from Breadloaf Writer’s Conference, Ucross Residency, and Sewanee Writer’s Conference. She has been awarded the William Richey Prize, the Jack Dyer Award, and a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts for her fiction.

**The Torturer’s Wife**
By Thomas Glave

Thomas Glave was born in the Bronx and grew up there and in Kingston, Jamaica. A 1993 Honors graduate of Bowdoin College and a graduate of Brown University, Glave traveled as a Fulbright Scholar to Jamaica, where he studied Jamaican historiography and Caribbean intellectual and literary traditions. While in Jamaica, Glave worked on issues of social justice, and helped found the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals, and Gays (J-FLAG). Glave is author of *Whose Song? and Other Stories* and his essay collection *Words to Our Now: Imagination and Dissent* won a 2005 Lambda Literary Award. His edited anthology, *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles*, was published in June 2008. The recipient of numerous fellowships and awards, including an O. Henry Prize for fiction and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Fine Arts Center in Provincetown, Glave was named a “Writer on the Verge” by The Village Voice in 2000. He is presently Martin Luther King, Jr. Visiting Professor in the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

**Prince Valiant Works the Black Seam**
By W. David Hall

**Out of Body**
By Glenville Lovell
Glenville Lovell is the author of three novels, *Fire in the Canes; Song of Night;* and *Too Beautiful To Die,* as well as several short stories and a number of prize-winning plays. Lovell won the 2002 Frank Collymore Literary Award for his play *Mango Ripe! Mango Sweet!* His novels and plays have represented Barbados on several occasions at CARIFESTA (Caribbean Festival of Arts), the premier arts festival in the Caribbean. Having toured the globe as a dancer before he became a writer, Glennville sometimes resorts to music and choreography to help understand and develop his characters. Lovell was born and raised on the island of Barbados. Glenville now lives in New York and is currently working on a new Blades Overstreet book and another novel set in Barbados.

**A Few Good Men**  
By David Nicholson

**Excerpt from Yellow Moon**  
By Jewell Parker Rhodes  

Jewell Parker Rhodes is the author of five novels: *Voodoo Dreams; Magic City; Douglass' Women; Voodoo Season;* and *Yellow Moon;* and a memoir, *Porch Stories: A Grandmother's Guide to Happiness.* A sixth novel, *Hurricane Levee Blues,* and a children’s novel, *Ninth Ward,* will be published in 2010. She has also authored two writing guides: *Free Within Ourselves: Fiction Lessons for Black Authors* and *The African American Guide to Writing and Publishing Non-Fiction.* Her play, *Voodoo Dreams,* was cited as "Most Innovative" Drama in the 2000-2001 Professional Theater Season by the *Arizona Republic* and she is currently at work on a theatrical version of *Douglass' Women.* Her literary awards include: Yaddo Creative Writing Fellowship, the American Book Award, the National Endowment of the Arts Award in Fiction, the Black Caucus of the American Library Award for Literary Excellence, the PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Award for Outstanding Writing, two Arizona Book Awards, and a finalist citation for the Hurston-Wright Legacy Award. Dr. Jewell Parker Rhodes is the Artistic Director for Global Engagement and the Piper Endowed Chair of the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing at Arizona State University. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Drama Criticism (Honors) a Master of Arts in English, and a Doctor of Arts in English (Creative Writing) from Carnegie-Mellon University.

**Microstories**  
By John Edgar Wideman

John Edgar Wideman was born in Washington, DC. in 1941 and was raised in Homewood, a community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which has been the locale of much of his fiction. After winning a Rhodes scholarship to study philosophy at Oxford University and returning to the United States in 1966, Wideman spent a year as a Kent Fellow at the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, where he completed his first novel, *A Glance Away,* published in 1967. His other novels include *Two Cities; Hurry Home; The Lynchers; Hiding Place; Sent for You Yesterday; Philadelphia Fire;* and *The Cattle Killing.* He is the author of a memoir, *Brothers and Keepers.* His short story collections are *Damballah; Fever; The Stories of John Edgar Wideman;* and *All Stories Are True.* A widely-celebrated writer and the winner of many literary awards, he
is the first to win the International PEN/Faulkner Award twice: in 1984 for *Sent for You Yesterday* and in 1990 for *Philadelphia Fire*. In 2000 he won the O. Henry Award for his short story "Weight", published in *The Callaloo Journal*. He is also the recipient of a MacArthur genius grant. Wideman was chosen as winner of the Rea Award for the Short Story in 1998, for outstanding achievement in that genre. In 1997, his novel *The Cattle Killing* won the James Fenimore Cooper Prize for Best Historical Fiction. He has taught at the University of Wyoming, University of Pennsylvania, where he founded and chaired the African American Studies Department, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst's MFA Program for Poets & Writers. He currently teaches at Brown University, and he sits on the contributing editorial board of the literary journal *Conjunctions*.

**The Gangsters**

By Colson Whitehead

http://www.colsonwhitehead.com/Home/Home.html

Colson Whitehead was born in 1969, and was raised in Manhattan. After graduating from Harvard College, he started working at the Village Voice, where he wrote reviews of television, books, and music. His first novel, *The Intuitionist*, was a winner of the Quality Paperback Book Club's New Voices Award. *John Henry Days* followed in 2001, an investigation of the steel-driving man of American folklore. The novel received the Young Lions Fiction Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. *The Colossus of New York* is a book of essays about the city. It was published in 2003 and was a New York Times Notable Book of the Year. *Apex Hides the Hurt* (2006) is a novel about a "nomenclature consultant" who gets an assignment to name a town, and was a recipient of the PEN/Oakland Award. *Sag Harbor*, published in 2009, is a novel about teenagers hanging out in Sag Harbor, Long Island during the summer of 1985. Colson Whitehead's reviews, essays, and fiction have appeared in a number of publications, such as the *New York Times; The New Yorker; New York Magazine; Harper's; and Granta*. He has received a MacArthur Fellowship, a Whiting Writers Award, and a fellowship at the Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers.

**Excerpt from Where the Line Bleeds**

By Jesmyn Ward

Jesmyn Ward grew up in DeLisle, Mississippi. Her first novel, *Where the Line Bleeds* (Agate, Nov. 2008), is about twin brothers navigating life after high school in a small Gulf Coast town. *Where the Line Bleeds* is an Essence Book Club Selection, a 2009 Honor Award recipient from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, and a nominee for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award (winner to be announced in November 2009). The manuscript version of the novel also received the Hopwood prize at the University of Michigan. Ward has had essays and fiction published in *Oxford American; A Public Space;* and *Bomb* magazines. She holds a B.A. in English and M.A. in communication from Stanford University, and an MFA from the University of Michigan. She is currently entering her second year as a Stegner Fellow at Stanford.

**Arrivederci, Aldo**

By Kim Sykes
Kim Sykes is an actor and writer who has performed in New York at The Public Theater, the New York Theater Workshop and La Mama and regionally at The Actor's Theater of Louisville, Stageworks, Hudson and Crossroads Theater. She was a member of the First Amendment Comedy and Improvisational Company. Film credits include the features *Herman USA*; *The Crow*; and *Single White Female*. Her numerous television appearances include *Law and Order*; *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*; *West Wing*; *Spin City*; *One Life To Live*; *Guiding Light* and many more. She has also written short stories that have been included in both *Brooklyn Noir 3* and *Queens Noir*.

**Young Adult Literature**

**Excerpt from Chains**
By Laurie Halse Anderson
http://www.writerlady.com/

Laurie Halse Anderson was born in Potsdam, New York in 1961. She began her career as a freelance journalist, and worked for a time at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. In 1999, she wrote what is arguably her most famous novel, *Speak*, which won numerous awards and was a *New York Times* bestseller. *Speak* was adapted into a film in 2004, starring Kristen Stewart in the lead role of Melinda Sordino. The following year, Anderson wrote *Fever 1793*, a historical fiction piece. In 2002, she wrote *Catalyst*, set in the same high school as *Speak*, and featuring cameo appearances from the earlier book's characters. A historical fiction book, *Thank You, Sarah! The Woman Who Saved Thanksgiving* was also published in 2002. Anderson published *Prom* in 2005, which appeared on *The New York Times* bestseller list during early 2005, and in 2007 she released *Twisted*, which has won awards such as the National Awards: ALA Best Book for Young Adults 2008, ALA Quick Pick for Young Adults 2008, International Reading Association Top Ten of 2007, and New York Public Library Best Books for the Teen Age, and also became a *New York Times* bestseller. In 2008, Anderson published *Chains*, entitled *Forge*, which will be released in 2010. She claims it will be followed by a third novel as well. Anderson's most recent novel, *Wintergirls*, was released in March 2009. *Wintergirls* has received 5 star reviews and debuted on *The New York Times* Bestseller List.

**Excerpt from Mary Jane**
By Dorothy Sterling

Dorothy Sterling was an author whose more than 35 books for children and adults included some of the first nonfiction works about black history for young readers, notably *Freedom Train*, about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. She attended Wellesley College and graduated from Barnard College in 1934. After college, she worked as a journalist and writer in New York for several years. Sterling wrote two books on black history for children, *Forever Free: The Story of the Emancipation Proclamation* (1963) and *It Started in Montgomery* (1972), and many more for young adults, notably *Tear Down the Walls!: A History of the American Civil Rights Movement* (1968) and *Black Foremothers: Three Lives* (1979). She also wrote, for adults, *Tender Warriors* (1958), about students entering previously segregated schools. The book, based on interviews she conducted on a tour of the South in 1957, provided raw material for *Mary Jane*
(1959), a young-adult novel. Her last book was a political memoir entitled *Close to My Heart* (2005).