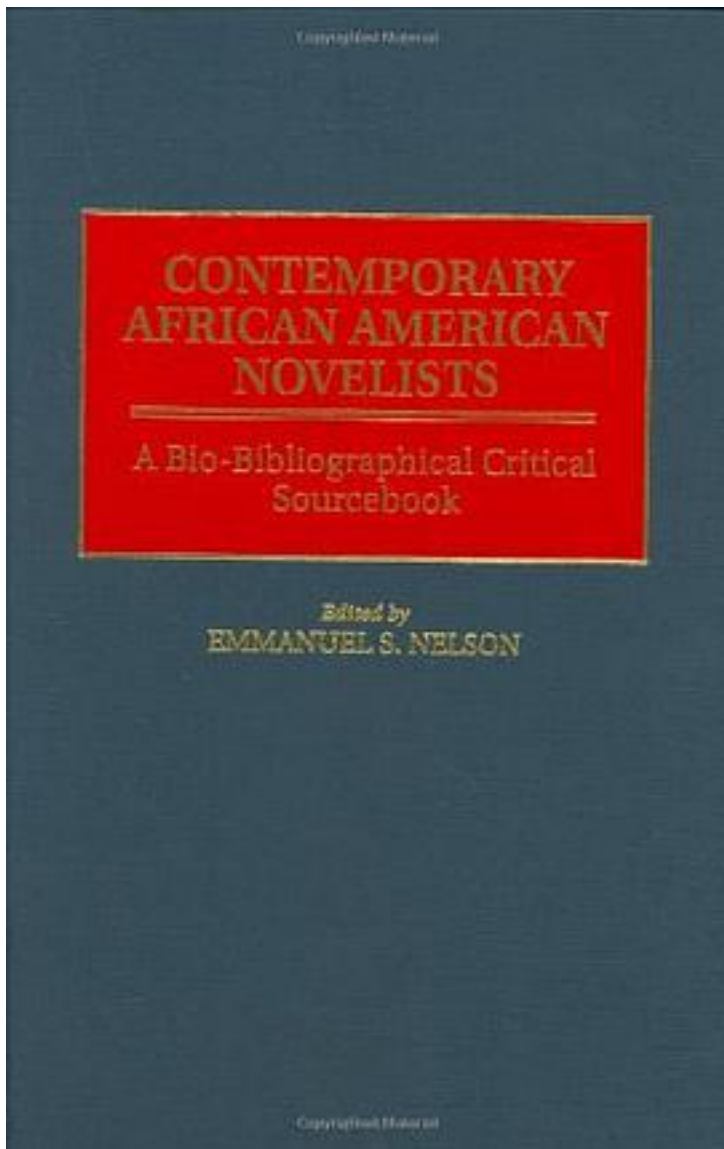


Contemporary African American Novelists



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During the last two decades, African American writers have emerged as a distinct and dominant force in world literature. This force has been gathering momentum since the 1950s, when James Baldwin published some of his most compelling works and Ralph Ellison stunned the literary establishment with his dazzling "Invisible Man" (1952). Empowered by the Civil Rights Movement and revitalized by the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, this force became more potent and pervasive. The publication of Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" in 1970 was a major event in the literary history of the United States. With a voice as original as America itself, she began to conquer the English language and redefine the international literary landscape. Along with Morrison, scores of African American writers have mapped bold new territories and firmly entrenched themselves in the forefront of contemporary American literature. This reference book is a guide to the lives, works, and achievements of 79 contemporary African American novelists. Through alphabetically arranged entries written by expert contributors, this volume offers lively, concise, and current information about these writers. Each entry begins with a biographical sketch of the author, provides a judicious critical assessment of the author's major works and themes, gives a representative sample of the critical responses the author's novels have elicited, and concludes with a selected bibliography that lists the author's publications as well as useful secondary material. Included are major figures, such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison. There are also entries for many noteworthy but lesser known figures, such as Tina McElroy Ansa, Bebe Moore Campbell, Randall Kenan, Reginald McKnight, Marita Golden, and Arthur Flowers. Some are popular writers with mass appeal, such as Terri McMillan and Frank Yerby; others, such as Octavia E. Butler, are known for their science fiction. Still others are distinguished poets or playwrights who have also published one or more significant novels. Of the 79 novelists profiled, 41 are women, and roughly a dozen have identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Thus the volume demonstrates the enormous diversity of these writers and the breadth of their contribution to world literature.

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