

# New Directions

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## Bookfile

Editorial Staff

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## BOOKFILE

30



*MAGGIE'S American Dream: The Life and Times of a Black Family*, by James P. Comer, published by New American Library, New York City.

This 228-page book tells a fascinating story of the author's mother, who was born in abject poverty in Mississippi but managed to succeed in life against all sorts of odds. Part a moving oral history, as told to the son by the mother, and part the author's own account of the Comer family, this work is the latest by the Howard alumnus who teaches child psychiatry at Yale University. Previously, he authored *Beyond Black and White*, *Black Child Care*, and *School Power*.

"*Maggie's American Dream*, although the story of one African American family, offers an important lesson for all. And that lesson is the determination to rise from the bottom to the top by not allowing one's dream to pass into oblivion.

The odds may have been against her in the beginning, but Maggie's fortunes changed after she moved to East Chicago at the age of 16

and married Hugh Comer who taught her that "with patience, a little guile, and a lot of hard work," she could realize her dream. Together, Maggie and Hugh raised four children, all of them highly-educated achievers.

"With elegant simplicity, Comer takes the values of his childhood, the education of his youth and the experiences of his adult training, and shows a way out of indifference, hand-wringing, despair," writes journalist Charlayne Hunter-Gault in the Foreword. □

Paule Marshall  
**Soul Clap  
Hands  
and Sing**

With an Introduction by Thomas F. Saine

Howard  
University  
Press  
Library of  
Contemporary  
Literature

*Soul Clap Hands and Sing*, by Paule Marshall, published by Howard University Press, Washington, D.C.

This is a new edition, 185-pages long, of a collection of four short stories, first published in 1961. Two years earlier, Marshall, an early feminist, came out with her first novel, the highly praised *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, which told the story of a family in search of the American Dream.

*Soul Clap* speaks of the conflicts as well as the out-

come of a life, or lives, lived without any beneficial social focus. The protagonists, all of whom have led shallow lives, are old men: a wealthy retiree, a teacher, a broadcast manager and an entertainer.

"The stories of these men illustrate the timeliness and the universality of art. These males reflect the weaknesses that Greek artists of the fifth century before Christ posited for their tragic modern man," writes Professor Darwin Turner in his 38-page Introduction.

In each of the stories, a female character, to whom each man reaches out, provides inspiration so that each may regain a measure of self-worth. □



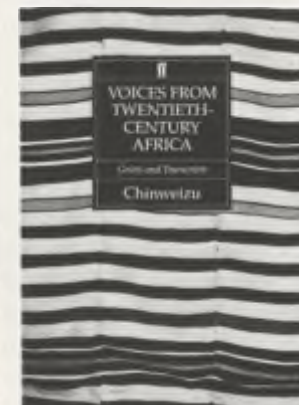
*The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era*, edited by Bruce Kellner, published by Routledge, Chapman & Hall, New York City.

This is a 476-page soft-cover reference work on an important period in African American literature and culture.

"'When Harlem was in vogue,' as its best poet

Langston Hughes described the period, the so-called Negro Renaissance blossomed and, with the onslaught of the Depression, wilted. Interest in the subject outside the black community seems to have begun in 1967 when the New York Public Library published *The Negro in New York*, a series of manuscripts prepared by the Federal Writers Project. Until then the information had gathered a quarter of a century of dust, occasionally disturbed by scholars, in the Schomburg Collection of the Harlem Branch of the library, its publication 'deferred and prevented because information contained in it was too startling for conservative taste,' " writes Kellner in the Introduction.

This work was first published in 1984 by Greenwood Press, Inc. Westport, CT. □



*Voices from Twentieth-Century Africa: Griots and Towncriers*, edited by Nigerian poet and cultural critic Chinweizu, published by Faber and Faber Limited, London-Boston.

This 424-page volume is

the latest work in African literature by one of the co-authors of another important volume, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*.

*Decolonization* was republished in paperback by Howard University Press in 1983. It was first published in 1980 in Nigeria.

Students of African literature, particularly, will find *Voices* to be valuable. This work essentially redraws the continental map of African literature, taking into consideration the many regional and language variations in use. It presents answers to many questions, even for the expert in the field.

On the topic of redrawing the literature map of Africa, Chinweizu states in the Introduction:

"In the conventional, official perception, which is shared by Africans and non-Africans alike, African literature is a new and fledgling product of the twentieth century; it is written in European languages, by and for a Western-educated African elite; its pioneers are the Senghors, Achebes, Soyinkas, Ngugis, Netos and p'Bitekis; its use is mainly academic, to add a dash of local flavour to a standard classroom diet of Western literature; and its coming of age was marked by the award of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature to one of its pioneers . . .

"However true it may be of African literature created under European dispensation, that conventional picture gives an incorrect por-

trait of African literature as a whole . . .

"The conventional view of African literature needs to be corrected, not only for the sake of accuracy, but also because . . . it has permitted Euro-assimilationist junk, in the guise of 'serious literature', to be upheld as the flower of African literature." □



*Women, Culture, & Politics*, by Angela Y. Davis, published by Random House, New York City.

This latest work by political activist Davis is 238 pages long and touches on issues of concern to global women.

Mostly, it is a collection of speeches and essays on topics that include the ongoing struggle for racial, sexual and economic equality.

Beyond the United States, the book includes the author's reflections on women in Egypt, Winnie Mandela, and the 1985 Nairobi conference of women of the world.

In the first chapter, she writes:

"Today, as we reflect on the process of empowering

Afro-American women, our most efficacious strategies remain those that are guided by the principle used by Black women in the club movement. We must strive to 'lift as we climb.' In other words, we must climb in such a way as to guarantee that all of our sisters, regardless of social class, and indeed all of our brothers, climb with us. This must be the essential dynamic of our quest for power — a principle that must not only determine our struggles as Afro-American women, but also govern all authentic struggles of dispossessed people. Indeed, the overall battle for equality can be profoundly enhanced by embracing this principle." □

*This column on current releases will appear from time to time. Ed.*