Afro-American literature in the wake of the Civil Rights movement
Antecedents

• Slave Narratives written in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century

• The Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s: Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, Jean Toomer, Claude Mckay.
The Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement

• It was centered in Harlem, New York, but had far-reaching influence in art, music and literature

• The interplay of race and culture and the developing of aesthetic appreciation in writing are some of the intellectual legacies of the Harlem Renaissance.
1950s and 60s: the social context

- The spirit of the **Jim Crow laws** that had been passed in the South between 1890 and 1910 was still prevalent in the 1950s
- The Civil Rights movement
- The Second Great Migration
- Urban realism – urban sensibility defines much of the African-American literature of this era.
• Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison as eminent writers in the 1940s and 1950s. Landmarks:
  • *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938), *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945) by Richard Wright
  • *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953) by James Baldwin
  • *Invisible Man* (1952) by Ralph Ellison (National Book award)
James Baldwin (1924-1987)

- Lived in Harlem as a child, after his mother had divorced her husband and married a preacher
- Extremely difficult childhood (beaten up by a gang of police officers at ten, abusive adoptive father...)
- The quest to explain familiar and social repudiation became main motifs in his writing
James Baldwin

• Role of religion in his life

• Expatriation to Paris in 1948, where he became part of the Left Bank community

• Return to US in 1957. Social and political activism (met Malcolm X, Luther King and Senator Kennedy), “the latest slave rebellion”. Called for civil disobedience after a bomb exploded in a church (“the good white people on the hill”)
• *First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists* held at la Sorbonne in 1956
According to James Baldwin, black writers shared common features, such as a painful relation to the white world, a lack of self-confidence and the necessity to rename the world in their own image.
• The challenge that the black writer is facing today is "the creation of a language that is faithful to the experience of blacks in the New World, a language that expresses the adaptation of traditional African and European forms, and the dynamic transformations and reinventions of self that results” (Baldwin)
JAMES BALDWIN

• "It is astonishing that in a country so devoted to the individual, so many people should be afraid to speak."
Ralph Ellison (1914-1964)

- Early life: son of a construction foreman who encouraged his artistic aspirations
- Moved to New York and joined the communist party
- Became a teacher of Russian and American literature
- In 1957 he became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters
Invisible Man (1952)

- The novel confronts the social invisibility of black people in America

- Author refuses to sentimentalise black culture or present it in terms of an “authentic” ethnic heritage or descent
• Title coming from H.G. Wells’ *The Invisible Man*
• The overarching theme is the social invisibility of Black people
• The book begins and ends in a small underground room, a symbolic location
African American Literature
The 1970s to the Present

• African-American literature began to enter the mainstream of publishing.
• African American literature began to be defined and discussed by scholars.
• Black women began to achieve success as novelists, poets, writers and artists.
Black women writers

• Women take central stage in the 1970s and 1980s
• Toni Cade Bambara, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison...
• Alice Walker won the Pulitzer Prize in 1983 and Toni Morrison was the first black writer to be credited with the Nobel Prize in 1992
• They share with black writers a painful relation to the white world and the necessity to remake the world in their own image

• Use of a syncretistic language that blends different cultural traditions

• In their writing, gender is as relevant a factor as race and class
Here are some great web sites for further research:

- http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/slavenarratives/Slave_Narratives.htm
- http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/texts.html
African American literature is the body of literature produced in the United States by writers of African descent. It begins with the works of such late 18th-century writers as Phillis Wheatley. During the Civil Rights Movement, authors such as Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote about issues of racial segregation and black nationalism. Today, African American literature has become accepted as an integral part of American literature, with books such as Roots: The Saga of an American Family by Alex Haley, The Color Purple (1982) by Alice Walker, which won the Pulitzer Prize; and Beloved by Toni Morrison achieving both best-selling and award-winning status. American Literature. 6. 1.6. American Music. The African-American Civil Rights Movement (1955â€“1968) refers to the social movements in the United States aimed at outlawing racial discrimination against black Americans and restoring voting rights to them. This article covers the phase of the movement between 1955 and 1968, particularly in the South. The emergence of the Black Power Movement, which lasted roughly from 1966 to 1975, enlarged the aims of the Civil Rights Movement to include racial dignity, economic and political self-sufficiency, and freedom from oppression by white Americans. The movement was characterized by major campaigns See more ideas about civil rights, american history, african american history. Several blogs are established in the previous decade that cater to Afro-Latinos. Black History Facts. Black History Month. This act of racial violence galvanizes the civil rights movement. Two of the murderers are dead (one while in prison for the crime), the other two were indicted earlier this year. Reference: The Associated Press permissions 450 W. 33rd St., New York, NY 10001. The Union of Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King. Inside the civil rights activists' 15-year marriage. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King married in 1953 and had four children before his 1968 death. Interracial Marriage. The Civil Rights Movement was another phase of black political protest, rather than something entirely new in the history of the United States, which is why the Civil Rights Movement is sometimes called 'The Second Reconstruction'™. Today many consider the Civil Rights Movement to have been led by Martin Luther King Jr, but key events make clear that it was the actions of everyday people - men, women, and children - that helped make the movement successful. Along with Malcolm X, the BPP represented strands of civil rights activism that drew attention to experiences of racial inequality happening in the cities of the north and California. Martin Luther King until 1968 had largely focused on southern issues. The Civil Rights Movement was successful in getting this country to follow its own laws. Black people, being the Super Americans that we are, fought to get the federal government to protect its own citizens right to vote and not be discriminated against in schools and in public buildings that their tax dollars paid for. Most African-Americans recognize that it was not the end of things (even in the 1970s few thought the battle was over) but mainstream culture considered it to be up until maybe just a few years ago.