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[Review of] Afro-American Writers, 1940-1955

Robert A. Aken

University of Kentucky, robaken@uky.edu

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Biographies

1051. Harris, Trudier, and Thadious M. Davis, eds. **Afro-American Writers, 1940-1955**. Detroit, Gale, 1988. 389p. illus. bibliog. index. (Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 76). \$95.00. LC 88-21423. ISBN 0-8103-4554-4.

This "sixth and final volume in [the DLB] series devoted exclusively to Afro-American writers" (p. xi) covers twenty-six novelists, poets, playwrights, biographers, screenwriters, and essayists who published significant works between 1940 and 1955. Other volumes in the subseries cover fiction writers after 1955 (see *ARBA* 85, entry 1056), dramatists and prose writers after 1955 (see *ARBA* 86, entry 1132), poets after 1955 (see *ARBA* 86, entry 1155), writers before the Harlem Renaissance (see *ARBA* 87, entry 1069), and writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940 (see *ARBA* 88, entry 1158). The essays in this volume begin with a list of works by each writer followed by discussions (punctuated with photographs) of each writer's life and works, and conclude with selected references to critical works (not linked to the text) and locations of papers. Essay length varies for each author based on his or her renown (e.g., three pages for William Blackwell Branch, twenty-three for Richard Wright). References are often insufficient (e.g., two references for J. Saunders Redding, three for Melvin Tolson, four for Margaret Walker), although the entry for Ralph Ellison has eighty-one references. The essays are well written, some critical, some simply descriptive, by little-known scholars (although Robert Farnsworth composed the Tolson entry), and all significant authors of the period are covered (e.g., Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, Chester Himes, Ann Petry). Three additional essays describe the Hatch-Billops Collection, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, and the Schomburg Center. A superfluous reprint of the readily available December 1950 issue of *Phylon* expands the text by sixty-two pages, space that could have been better used for an analytical index. The work concludes with a forty-six-item general bibliography and the usual DLB cumulative index.

Robert Aken
