

# National Book Foundation Celebrates Black History Month

A Timeline of the First African American writers to Become National Book Award Honored Authors

1950



**1953**  
**RALPH ELLISON** is the first African American National Book Award Fiction Winner for *Invisible Man*.

**1957**  
**JAMES BALDWIN** receives his first major literary honor and the first of four Finalist nominations for the novel *Giovanni's Room*.

1960

**1962**  
**JAMES BALDWIN** is the first African American Nonfiction Finalist for his collection of essays, *Nobody Knows My Name*.

**1969**  
**GWENDOLYN BROOKS** is the first African American Poetry Finalist for *In the Mecca*.



1970

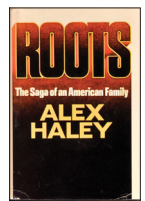
**1972**  
**VIRGINIA HAMILTON** and **JUNE JORDAN** are the first African American Finalists for Young People's Literature for *The Planet of Junior Brown and His Own Where*.



June Jordan

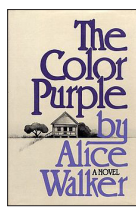
**1973**  
**NIKKI GIOVANNI** is the first female African American Nonfiction Finalist for her autobiography *Gemini*.

**1975**  
**VIRGINIA HAMILTON** is the first African American woman to win a National Book Award for *M.C. Higgins the Great*, the only children's book to receive a National Book Award, Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and a Newbery Medal.



**1977**  
National Book Award judges award **ALEX HALEY** a special citation of merit for *Roots*, a fictionalized account of the author's family history. The first major literary honor for the author.

1980



**1983**  
**ALICE WALKER** is the first African American woman to win a National Book Award for Fiction for *The Color Purple*.

**1983**  
**GLORIA NAYLOR** is the first African American to win a National Book Award for a First Novel for *The Women of Brewster Place*.



1990

**1991**  
**ORLANDO PATTERSON** is the first African American to win a National Book Award for Nonfiction for *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*.



**1994**  
**GWENDOLYN BROOKS** is the first African American to receive the Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.

**1999**  
**WALTER DEAN MYERS** is the first African American Finalist for Young People's Literature for *Monster*.



**1999**  
**OPRAH WINFREY** receives the Foundation's 50th Anniversary Gold Medal.



**1999**  
**Ai** is the first African American to win a National Book Award for Poetry for *Vice: New and Selected Poems*.

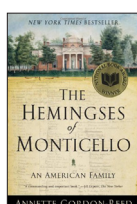


2000

**2006**  
**NATHANIEL MACKEY** is the first African American man to win a National Book Award for Poetry for *Splay Anthem*.



**2008**  
**ANNETTE GORDON-REED** is the first African American woman to win a National Book Award for Nonfiction for *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*.



**2013**  
**DR. MAYA ANGELOU** is the first African American to receive the Foundation's Literarian Award for Outstanding Service to the American Literary Community.



**2014**  
**JACQUELINE WOODSON** is the first African American to win a National Book Award for Young People's Literature for *Brown Girl Dreaming*.

