Bontemps, Arna

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Black Notes" (1933) and the two-part story "Tin Can" (1934), which won the 1933 literary prize. The various stories thematize issues of colorism, marital betrayal, family strife, and poverty. "A Sealed Pod" (1936), an unflattering image of peas not touching despite their closeness, metaphorizes Frye Street while it chronicles the murder of a young woman by her lover. Three stories published in 1939, "The Makin's," "The Whipping," and "Hongry Fire," differently depict the corrosive effects of the urban environment on children. "Patch Quilt" (1940), set in the rural South, resists the contemporary tendency to romanticize the southern small town, portraying the environment as confining rather than pastoral. Occomy's last published short story, "One True Love" (1941), again illustrates the double bind of the African American woman's position described in "On Being Young—A Woman—and Colored."

Marita Bonner Occomy died in 1971 from injuries sustained in a fire in her Chicago apartment. Publishing for only sixteen years, her literary contribution to African American literature is significant. Her characterization of urban environments as destructive and corrupting prefigures, even perhaps influenced, Richard Wright's portrayal of the urban in "Native Son" (1940). Her ability to traverse genres and treat a myriad of themes demonstrates not only the versatility of her talents but also the diversity of African American culture and experience during the interwar era.


—Kim Jenice Dillon

BONTEMPS, ARNA (1902–1973), novelist, poet, and librarian. Born in Alexandria, Louisiana, the first child of a Roman Catholic bricklayer and a Methodist schoolteacher, Arna Wendell Bontemps grew up in California and graduated from Pacific Union College. After college he accepted a teaching position in Harlem at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, and in 1926 and 1927 won first prizes on three separate occasions in contests with other "New Negro" poets. The same years marked his marriage to Alberta Johnson and the start of a family of six children.

Bontemps's first effort at a novel (Charriot in the Cloud, 1929), a bildungsroman set in southern Califor-
and put the finishing touches on *Drums at Dusk* (1939), his historical portrayal of the celebrated eighteenth-century black revolution on the island of Santo Domingo.

With great relief he completed *Father of the Blues* (1941), the "autobiography" commissioned by the ever-testy W. C. Handy; he edited his first compilation, *Golden Slippers: An Anthology of Negro Poetry for Young Readers* (1941); he then published a humorous American tall tale for children coauthored with his WPA colleague Jack Conroy titled *The Fast Sooner Hound* (1942); he was awarded two additional Rosenwald grants to pursue a degree and to write a book on "the Negro in Illinois"; and in 1943 he completed a master's degree in library science at the University of Chicago, clearing the way to his appointment as librarian at Fisk University.

In 1946 the controversial musical based on his first novel reached Broadway as *St. Louis Woman* for a short but successful run. Arguably his most distinguished work of the decade was *The Story of the Negro* (1948), a race history since Egyptian civilization that won him the Jane Addams Children's Book Award for 1956. Then, with Langston Hughes, he edited *The Poetry of the Negro* (1949), a comprehensive collection of poems by blacks and tributary poems by nonblacks.

An assortment of histories and biographies, largely written with youths in mind, emerged from Fisk throughout the 1950s and the succeeding civil rights years. Bontemps and Hughes's collaboration produced two anthologies during this period, *The Book of Negro Folklore* (1959) and *American Negro Poetry* (1963).

After Hughes's death in 1967, Bontemps compiled *Hold Fast to Dreams* (1969), a montage of poems by black and white writers. But compilations of a more personal sort rounded off his long career. They include *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered* (1972), featuring an introductory reflection by Bontemps and twelve critical essays on literary figures from the era; *Personals* (1963), a collection of his own poems reissued in 1973 as a third edition with a prefatory personal history; and *The Old South: "A Summer Tragedy" and Other Stories of the Thirties* (1973), which opens with the personal essay "Why I Returned," places most of his short fiction under a single cover.

Retirement from Fisk in 1966 brought recognition in the form of two honorary degrees and distinguished professorial appointments at the University of Illinois (Chicago Circle), Yale University, and back at Fisk as writer in residence. Following his death in 1973, early estimates of his career from Sterling A. *Brown and Aaron Douglas noted that he deserves to be known much better than he has been. Aptly, the Yale appointment included the title of Curator of the James Weldon Johnson Collection at the Beinecke Library, for prevalent views have come to regard him as a chronicler and keeper of black cultural heritage. It is worth noting that the vast and unique body of extant correspondence with his friend Langston Hughes is housed in this archive. Bontemps's most distinctive works are ringing affirmations of the human passion for freedom and the desire for social justice inherent in us all. Arnold *Rampersad called him the conscience of his era and it could be fairly added that his tendency to fuse history and imagination represents his personal legacy to a collective memory.*


—Charles L. James

**BOYD, CANDY** (b. 1946), born Marguerite Dawson, educator, activist, and novelist. Educating people about their positive potential has long been Candy Boyd's priority. As a high school student, she tried to stop block-busting in her native Chicago by convincing three of her friends, an African American, a Jew, and a Protestant, to join her in personal visits to more than two hundred white families. She withdrew from college to work as an organizer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. When she finally earned her bachelor's degree from Northeastern Illinois State University, she became, in her own words, a "militant teacher." She worked with Operation PUSH, organized neighborhood beautification projects, and used her Saturdays to take students on excursions to parks, theaters, and other neighborhoods.

When Boyd moved to Berkeley, California, and began teaching in a more diversely multicultural setting, her frustration with literary stereotypes and negative depictions of African Americans was exacerbated by her discovery that Asians, Latinos, and many Euro-Americans suffered similar literary treatment. She decided to write books for children that were honest, interesting, and inspiring. Though she had earned a PhD in education from the University of California and had been teaching for several years, Boyd prepared for this task by taking courses in writing for children and by reading every children's book in the Berkeley Public Library.

Named Professor of the Year at St. Mary's College in 1992, Candy Boyd is renowned for training teachers and creating organizations that encourage and develop reading among young people. In her books, schools are sites for learning and developing responsibility outside the family. Her characters encounter bullies, liars, and other misdirected classmates and teachers. They also build relationships with adults and children who inspire and guide them.

Candy Boyd's books explore complex and perplexing questions about the world and the emotions en-