



Gwendolyn Bennett

Biography

Gwendolyn Bennett was born on July 8, 1902 in Giddings, Texas to Mayme Frank (Abernathy) and Joshua Robin Bennett. She spent her early childhood in Wadsworth, Nevada on the Paiute Indian Reservation, where her parents taught in the Indian Service for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The family relocated to Washington, D.C. in 1906 so her father could pursue his law degree and her mother could train to be a manicurist and beautician. In 1910, Mayme filed for divorce and was awarded custody of the couple's only child. As a result, Joshua kidnapped Bennett and first took her to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, then settled in Brooklyn, New York.

Bennett attended the prestigious Brooklyn High School for Girls and became the first black member of the school's Literary and Dramatic Societies. Upon her graduation from high school in 1921, she enrolled at Columbia University. She eventually earned her college degree from the Pratt Institute in 1924. After completing college, she was hired as an Assistant Professor of Art at Howard University, but she left in 1925 when she was awarded a \$1000 scholarship to study art at the Sorbonne in Paris. Once she returned to the United States, she resumed her position at Howard University and began to emerge as an influential literary figure during the Harlem Renaissance.

Quick Facts

- * 1902-1981
- * Influential writer of the Harlem Renaissance
- * Published poems and a piece of fiction in the magazine *Opportunity*

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Biography continued

After returning to America, she continued to focus on African-American cultural and social evolution in the arts and literature. She was assistant editor of the magazine *Opportunity* (1923-1934), author of "The Ebony Flute," a literary column appearing in the magazine (1926-1928), as well as co-founder of the literary journal *Fire!!* (1926). She also reviewed other writers' work and contributed to the literary magazines on a regular basis. In November 1926, her only piece of fiction, "Wedding Day," was published in *Opportunity*. Throughout the 1920s, she continued to write poems, such as "Heritage" (1926), "Song" (1926), "Hatred" (1926), and "Wind" (1924). Although Bennett never published her own collection of poetry, she remained a strong influence during the Harlem Renaissance movement by energizing the community with poems about racial pride and Africa and celebrating blackness through romantic lyric. In 1927, she married Dr. Alfred Joseph Jackson, and the couple moved to Eustis, Florida where they remained until returning to New York in the early 1930s. Jackson died in 1936, and in 1940, Bennett entered into an interracial marriage with Richard Crosscup, which was not socially accepted at the time. During the 1930s and 1940s, Bennett remained active in the arts, serving as a member of the Harlem Artists Guild in 1935, and directing the Harlem Community Arts Center from 1939-1944. In the early 1940s, she was active on the board of the Negro Playwright's Guild and involved in the development of the George Washington Carver Community School.

Bennett left the public eye during the 1940s, but she remained with her husband in New York. She worked as a secretary for the Consumer's Union during the later years of her life, and, in 1968, retired with Crosscup to Kutztown, Pennsylvania, where they opened an antique shop. In 1980, Crosscup passed away due to heart failure. Bennett died on May 30, 1981 in the Reading County Hospital.



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Selected Bibliography

Works by the author

Fiction

“Wedding Day” (Fire!!, 1926).

Nonfiction

“The Harlem Artists’ Guild” (*Art Front*, 1937).

“I Go to Camp” (*Opportunity*, 1934).

“Never the Twain Shall Meet” (*Opportunity*, 1934): 92.

“The American Negro Paints” (*Southern Workman*, 1928).

“The Ebony Flute” [column] (*Opportunity*, August 1926-May 1928).

“Negroes: Inherent Craftsmen” (*Howard University Record*, 1925).

“The Future of the Negro in Art” (*Howard University Record*, 1924).

Poetry

“Epitaph” (*Opportunity*, 1934).

“Street Lamps in Early Spring” (*Opportunity*, 1926).

“Lines Written at the Grave of Alexander Dumas” (*Opportunity*, 1926).

“Dear Things” (*Palms*, 1926).

“Dirge” (*Palms*, 1926).

“Moon Tonight” (*Gypsy*, 1926).

“Song” (*Palms*, 1926).

“Purgation” (*Opportunity*, 1925).

“On a Birthday” (*Opportunity*, 1925).

“To Usward” (*Crisis*, 1924; *Opportunity*, 1924).

“Wind” (*Opportunity*, 1924).

“Heritage” (*Opportunity*, 1923).



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