

Illinois State Library
April 2003

Gwendolyn Brooks **1917 – 2000**

Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks, the Poet Laureate of Illinois from 1968-2000, is the author of over twenty books of poetry, fiction, children's books, autobiographies, and nonfiction including *Winnie* (1988); *The Near-Johannesburg Boy and Other Poems* (1986); *Report from Part One* (1972); *Riot* (1969); *In the Mecca* (1968); *The Bean Eaters* (1960); *Maud Martha* (1953); and *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945). A notable lecturer as well, Brooks was awarded over seventy-five honorary degrees from colleges and universities throughout the United States. In 1950, she became the first African-American writer to win the Pulitzer Prize for her second published volume of verse, *Annie Allen* (1949). She also received a lifetime achievement award from the National Endowment for the Arts and a National Book Foundation Award for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. She served as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress from 1985-86, and in 1994, the National Endowment for the Humanities named her its Jefferson Lecturer, the highest honor the federal government bestows for distinguished intellectual achievement in the humanities.

Born in Topeka, Kansas, the daughter of David and Keziah Corinne (Wims) Brooks, Brooks was raised in Chicago, where she resided all her life. After completing high school in 1935, she attended Woodrow Wilson Junior College and graduated with an Associates degree in 1936. Brooks published her first poem at age 13, and at seventeen became a regular contributor of poems to *The Chicago Defender*, a black daily newspaper in Chicago. In 1939, she married Henry L. Blakely and together they had two children, Nora Brooks Blakely and Henry Blakely Jr. A strong advocate for children and creative writing, she established the Illinois Poet Laureate Awards in 1969 to encourage high school and elementary students to write. A major literary force for more than five decades, Brooks was hailed by Robert Hass, Poet Laureate of the United States from 1995 to 1997, as one of the most important African-American poets of the 20th century. Brooks died of cancer on December 3, 2000.

Primary Works:

A Street in Bronzeville, Harper, 1945. (811 B8732)

Annie Allen, Harper, 1949. (811 B8732A)

Maud Martha, a novel, Harper, 1953. Reprinted by AMS Press in 1974. (813 BROO)

Bronzeville Boys and Girls, Harper, 1956. (811.54 BROO2)

The Bean Eaters, Harper, 1960. (811.54 BROO 12)

Selected Poems, Harper, 1963. (811.54 BROO3)

In the Time of Detachment, In the Time of Cold. Springfield, Ill., The Civil War Centennial Commission of Illinois, 1965

In the Mecca, Poems, Harper & Row, 1968. (811 B8732I)

For Illinois 1968: A Sesquicentennial Poem, Harper, 1968. (I. 811 BROO)

Riot, Broadside Press, 1969. (811 BROO4)

Family Pictures, Broadside Press, 1970. (811 BROO2)

Aloneness, Broadside Press, 1971. (818.5407 BROO3)

A Broadside Treasury (Editor), Broadside Press, 1971. (811 BROO3)

Jump Bad: A New Chicago Anthology (Editor), Broadside Press, 1971. (810.8 BROO)

The World of Gwendolyn Brooks (contains *A Street in Bronzeville, Annie Allen, Maud Martha, The Bean Eaters*, and *In the Mecca*), Harper & Row, 1971.
(811 BROO)

Aurora, Broadside Press, 1972. (811.54 BROO 5)

Report from Part One: An Autobiography, Broadside Press, 1972. (921 BROOKS)

The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves: Or You Are What You Are, Third World Press, 1974, reissued, 1987. (OVERSIZE. 813.54 BROO2)

Beckonings, Broadside Press, 1975. (811.54 BROO)

Capsule Course in Black Poetry Writing, Broadside Press, 1975. (808.1 CAPS)

Primer for Blacks, Third World Press, 1980. Also published by Brooks Press, 1986, 1980. (811.54 BROO81981)

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Black Love, Brooks Press, 1982.

Mayor Harold Washington and Chicago, The I Will City, Brooks Press, 1983.
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Blacks (includes *A Street in Bronzeville*, *Annie Allen*, *The Bean Eaters*, *Maud Martha*, *A Catch of Shy Fish*, *Riot*, *In the Mecca*, and most of *Family Pictures*), David Co., 1987. (811.54 BROO4)

The Near-Johannesburg Boy, and Other Poems, David Co., 1987. (811.54 BROO13)

Gottschalk and the Grande Tarantelle, David Co., 1988. (811.54 BROO9)

Winnie, Third World Press, 1988. (811.54 BROO7)

Children Coming Home, David Co., 1991.

Report from Part Two, Third World Press, 1996. (811.54 BROO6)

In Montgomery: New and Other Poems, Third World Press, Forthcoming

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Dawson, Emma W. "Vanishing Point: The Rejected Black Woman in the Poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks." *Obsidian II* 4.1 (1989): 1-11.

Flynn, Richard. "The Kindergarten of Consciousness?: Gwendolyn Brooks and Social Construction of Childhood." *African American Review* 34.3 (2000): 483-499.

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- "Gwendolyn Brooks." *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*. Vol. 20. Gale Research, 1997. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: The Gale Group, 2003. <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com/itweb/ccmisl>>
**Database accessible at the Illinois State Library
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- "Gwendolyn Brooks." *Black Writers: A Selection of Sketches from Contemporary Authors*. Detroit: Gale, 1989. 64-69. (Ref. 920.0092 BLAC)
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Note: A call number in parentheses following an entry indicates that the Illinois State Library owns the title. Copies of journal articles and essays from books not owned by the library have been placed in the vertical file of the Reference Department.

**A Resolution to Name the Illinois State Library for the Late Poet Laureate
Gwendolyn Brooks**

093_HJ0011

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, The members of the Illinois General Assembly remember the life and work of Gwendolyn Brooks, poet laureate of the State of Illinois; and

WHEREAS, There are buildings located around the State Capitol complex that are named for prominent and influential people from the State including the late Governor William G. Stratton, the late Secretary of State Michael J. Howlett, and the late Margaret Cross Norton, the first director of the State Archives; and

WHEREAS, Gwendolyn Brooks honored the State of Illinois as poet laureate; a chair in Black Literature and Creative Writing was established for Ms. Brooks by Chicago State University a decade ago; the Center for African-American literature at Western Illinois University is also named for Ms. Brooks; in Harvey, Illinois, a junior high school is named in her honor; and

WHEREAS, In the final year of her life, Gwendolyn Brooks was named a living legend by the Library of Congress; and

WHEREAS, Gwendolyn Brooks was the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize; and

WHEREAS, The passing of Gwendolyn Brooks was deeply felt by all who knew and loved her, especially her family, friends, fellow poets, and the people of the State of Illinois; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NINETY-THIRD
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, THE SENATE CONCURRING
HEREIN, that we urge the State of Illinois to rename the Illinois State Library the Gwendolyn
Brooks Illinois State Library; and be it further

RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be presented to the family of Gwendolyn
Brooks and Secretary of State Jessie White.