**Negritude - Literature and Paintings**

**“Notebook of a Return to my Native Land” by Aimé Césaire (1939)**

*Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) was a poet, politician, and co-founder of the negritude movement. He was from the Island of Martinique, and was considered brilliant. He eventually studied in France, where he met Léopold Sédar Senghor and they founded a journal called “The Black Student” in 1934. Césaire wrote many poems and essays against colonialism, and was eventually elected the mayor of the capital of Martinique. His famous poem “Cahier d’un retour au pays natal (or Notebook of a Return to my Native Land)” was the first time “negritude” as a term was used. (*[*Article on Black Past*](https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/cesaire-aime-1913-2008/) *and* [*CATranslation*](https://www.catranslation.org/blog-post/my-negritude-is-what-exactly/). Translation by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith)

My negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against

the clamor of the day

my negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth’s

dead eye

my negritude is neither tower nor cathedral

it takes root in the red flesh of the soil

it takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky

it breaks through opaque prostration with its upright patience

**“Assassinations” by Léopold Sédar Senghor (Published 1948)**

*Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001) was a poet, politician, and co-founder of the Negritude Movement. He was orn in Senegal and was also considered brilliant. He went to study in France where he met Aimé Césaire, founded a journal and the Negritude movement together. He fought in WWII and was taken prisoner for two years. He eventually became the president of Senegal when it was decolonized in 1960. (*[*Article on BlackPast.org*](https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/senghor-leopold-sedar-1906-2001/) *and* [*Council for European Studies*](https://www.europenowjournal.org/2018/02/28/four-poems-by-leopold-sedar-senghor/)*)*

They lie there stretched out by the captive roads, along the

………..roads of disaster

The lean poplars, the statues of the dark gods

………..draped in their long gold coats

Senegalese prisoners miserably lying

………..on the French land.

In vain they cut your laughter, in vain the blacker the flower, the

………..blacker your flesh.

You are the flower of beauty among the first absence

………..nude flowers

Black flower blossom and its somber smile, diamond of a time

………..immemorial.

You are the mud and plasma of the world’s leafy

………..spring

From the primitive couple, you are the flesh of the womb, the

………..belly fertilizing milt

You are the sacred profusion of bright, blissful gardens

And the sovereign forest, victorious of fire and lightning

The vast song of your blood will defeat machines and canons

Your speech throbbing deceptions and lies

No hate in your soul, you are not hateful, no cunning

………..soul without cunning.

O Black Martyrs, immortal race, let me say the

………..words that forgive.

**“Africa” by David Diop (1950s)**

*David Diop [1927-1960 ] was born in Bordeaux, France. He had a Cameroonian mother and a Senegalese father. Diop is often considered one of the most promising French West African poets. His short life's work often involved his longing for Africa and his empathy for those fighting against the French colonization of the mainland. His work shows a hatred for the oppressors and the aforementioned empathy for the oppressed.*

*He died in a plane crash, and only had one anthology of poems published in 1956. This is perhaps his most famous poem.*

<https://allpoetry.com/poem/8562839-Africa-by-David-Diop>

Africa my Africa

Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs

Africa of whom my grandmother sings

On the banks of the distant river

I have never known you

But your blood flows in my veins

Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields

The blood of your sweat

The sweat of your work

The work of your slavery

Africa, tell me Africa

Is this your back that is unbent

This back that never breaks under the weight of humiliation

This back trembling with red scars

And saying no to the whip under the midday sun

But a grave voice answers me

Impetuous child that tree, young and strong

That tree over there

Splendidly alone amidst white and faded flowers

That is your Africa springing up anew

springing up patiently, obstinately

Whose fruit bit by bit acquires

The bitter taste of liberty.

**The Unsung Mothers of Négritude: An Examination of the Efforts of Women Behind the Movement**

By Emily C. Sheffield, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Alumna (2017)

In *Global Africana Review* Vol. 2, Spring 2018

Article PDF: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3392/5966bf80f7f42c4242d080d84ed1e7b2ed2b.pdf>

Read the article above about the women involved in the negritude movement. They were authors in their own right, and contributed in other ways as well, but english translations of their work are not easy to find.

Quote from Paulette Nadal November 17, 1963 in a letter toLéopold Sédar Senghor’s biographer: “They [Senghor, Césaire, Damas] took the ideas tossed out by us and expressed them with more flash and brio. We might have just been women, but we were the real pioneers. We blazed the trail for them.”

**Painting - “The Jungle” by Wilfredo Lam (1943)**

*Wilfredo Lam (1902-1982) was a Cuban painter, sculptor, print-maker, etc. His work is about the Afro-Cuban spirit and experience. He has a very distinctive and unique style, which was influenced by Surrealism but also influenced many other artists. The Jungle is considered to be his masterpiece. It is about the Afro-Cuban culture and experience.*

*“I wanted with all my heart to* [*pain*](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/glossary/#paint)*t the drama of my country, but by thoroughly expressing the black spirit, the beauty of the* [*plastic art*](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/glossary/#plastic-art) *of the blacks,” he once said. “I knew I was running the risk of not being understood. … But a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work even if it takes time.”*

[*From the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)*](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/wifredo-lam-the-jungle-1943/)



**Painting “Negritude” (1957) and Sculpture “Anyanwu (Sun)" (1966) by Ben Enwonwu**

*Ben Enwonwu (1917 - 1994) might be the most influential African artist of the 20th century. He was one of the earliest African artists to be exhibited in Europe and the US, and he helped to increase the popularity of African art around the world. He gained an international reputation, and used his fame to support Black Nationalism and other Black artists.*

[*Negritude*](http://www.artnet.com/artists/ben-enwonwu/negritude-HAI4OmqSInngdy7o4cFAFg2) *at Art* [*Anyanwu - United Nations*](https://www.unmultimedia.org/s/photo/detail/126/0126482.html)

 

[**Quotes by Ben Enwonwu**](http://africandigitalart.com/2014/05/ben-enwonwu-i-will-not-accept-an-inferior-position-in-the-art-world/)**:**

* “Negritude was an expression of Blackness, a celebration of the Black image. It was a great source of artistic wealth that Senghor, who had so much in him of poetry, personified. We, the artists, more or less drank from the fruits of his knowledge. I went to my home at Onitsha and began to use some of the traditional dances — particularly the dance movements and the colors — as a basis for representation.”
* "I will not accept an inferior position in the art world. Nor have my art called African because I have not correctly and properly given expression to my reality. I have consistently fought against that kind of philosophy because it is bogus.”
* “European artists like Picasso, Braque and Vlaminck were influenced by African art. Everybody sees that and is not opposed to it. But when they see African artists who are influenced by their European training and technique, they expect that African to stick to their traditional forms even if he bends down to copying them. I do not copy traditional art. I like what I see in the works of people like Giacometti but I do not copy them. I knew Giacometti personally in England, you know. I knew he was influenced by African sculptures. But I would not be influenced by Giacometti, because he was influenced by my ancestors."