

# CFP, MELUS Special Issue: “Black Women’s Literature: Violence & the COVID-19 Moment”

**A Special Issue of *MELUS* – Call for Papers  
Black Women’s Literature: Violence & the COVID-19 Moment**

**Guest Editors:** Robin Brooks (University of Pittsburgh) and Meina Yates-Richard (Emory University)

**Deadline for Abstract Submissions:** July 31, 2020

With news stories such as “Two Crises Convulse a Nation: A Pandemic and Police Violence” and “Pandemic Within a Pandemic,” US media headlines boldly announce that the nation is in the midst of two colliding catastrophes. This special issue centers the engagement and interconnection of black women’s literary studies with police/extrajudicial violence and matters highlighted by COVID-19, particularly questions related to reasons why the disease has disproportionately impacted black lives such as disparities in employment/work, income, healthcare, education, and housing. More specifically, this issue concentrates on the work of three renowned writers, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Ntozake Shange, which collectively spans over fifty years and embraces the diversity of black lives. In the aftermath of the passing of these three writers in October 2018 (Shange) and August 2019 (Morrison and Marshall), a collective reappraisal of their oeuvres, which include canonical works such as *Brown Girl, Brownstones, Praisesong for the Widow, The Fisher King, Beloved, The Bluest Eye, and For Colored Girls*, is both timely and a fitting tribute. Approximately five months after Marshall’s homegoing (the most recent loss), COVID-19 embarked on the shores of the United States, and black lives continue to be negatively impacted by the disease and all of the dis-ease it manufactures. Coupled with this new reality is the ongoing legacy of anti-black racism that too often plays a role in police and extrajudicial killings of people of African descent.

With both universal and culturally specific themes, the work of these writers—including their novels, short stories, plays, poetry, essays, lectures, and other nonfiction—remains significant even in this moment that has outlived them as it connects to contemporary debates relevant to our lives. In essence, this special issue explores the overarching question: how does the work of Marshall, Morrison, and Shange speak to contemporary affairs and concerns? Scholars have anthologized and lauded these writers’ work for its contributions to the fields of African American, American, and Caribbean literary studies as well as Africana studies and women’s studies. Researchers also have considered postmodernism, black feminism, postcolonialism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and critical race theory to analyze their work.

**For this special issue, we seek essays that theorize the writers’ work in relation but not limited to:**

- Various modes of violence (broadly defined)
- Anti-Blackness with regard to COVID-19 or police/extrajudicial violence
- Investigations of structural/systemic racism, human rights, and social justice matters
- The US legal system and ideologies around criminality, incarceration, and punishment
- Representations of class and income inequalities
- Portrayals of work and/or labor
- Delineations of death/mortality, health (broadly defined), and abuse (broadly defined)
- Depictions of generational differences, childhood, and aging/elderhood
- Ideas around education, disabilities, housing, environmentalism, and philanthropy
- Considerations of relationships (e.g., family, romantic, friendships), parenting, and foster care
- Assessments of intraracial and interethnic relations, immigration, and globalization
- Presentations of gender and sexuality
- Examinations of folklore, religion/spirituality, music and performance
- Relevant topics in the children's literature by these writers

A comparative focus among the writers is also encouraged. Essays do not need to address both COVID-19 and police/extrajudicial violence. Essay submissions will be due later in the year with an anticipated publication date in 2021. They must be 7,000 to 10,000 words (including notes and works cited). All submissions will go through *MELUS*'s normal refereeing process, and papers under consideration at other journals or published in any form will not be considered. **Please submit 250- to 300-word abstracts (and any inquiries) by July 31, 2020 to BlackLitCOVID@gmail.com.**