Walker, Margaret,


After graduating from Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. (B.A., 1935), Walker joined the Federal Writers' Project in Chicago, where she began a brief literary relationship with novelist Richard Wright. She attended the University of Iowa (M.A., 1940) and wrote For My People (1942), a critically acclaimed volume of poetry that celebrates black American culture. In the title poem, originally published in Poetry magazine in 1937, she recounts black American history and calls for a racial awakening.

Walker began teaching in the 1940s and joined the faculty at Jackson State College (now Jackson State University) at Jackson, Miss., in 1949. She completed her first novel, Jubilee (1966), as her doctoral dissertation for the University of Iowa (Ph.D., 1965). Based on the life of Walker's maternal great-grandmother, Jubilee chronicles the progress of a slave family from the mid- to late-19th century. In How I Wrote Jubilee (1972), Walker traced her development of the story from her grandmother's oral family history through her extensive historical research.

Her second volume of poetry, Prophets for a New Day (1970), makes comparisons between the prophets of the Bible and the black leaders of the civil rights movement. October Journey (1973) consists mostly of poems commemorating her personal heroes, such as Harriet Tubman, Gwendolyn Brooks, and her father. After she retired from teaching in 1979, Walker published Richard Wright: Daemonic Genius (1988) and a volume of poetry entitled This Is My Century (1989).