



ACTIVISM AND CURRENT WORKS OF ALICE WALKER

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ABSTRACT

Walker's works are known for their portrayals of the Black woman's life. She depicts vividly the sexism, racism, and poverty that often make that life a struggle. But she also portrays, as part of that life, the strengths of family, community, self-worth, and spirituality. Many of her novels depict women in other periods of history than our own. This article gives essential information about activism of Walker and just as with nonfiction women's history writing, such portrayals give a sense of the differences and similarities of the women's condition today and in that other time.

Walker continues not only to write but to be active in environmental, feminist/womanist causes and issues of economic justice. She published the novel, "Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart" in 2004 and has released several poetry collections and nonfiction works since then. In 2018, for example, Walker published a collection of poems titled "Taking the Arrow Out of the Heart." Her work and activism have been inspired by and served to help inspire social movements, particularly in the area of civil rights and women's issues. She published "Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Binding of Women" in 1993 as a companion volume to the documentary "Warrior Marks," which chronicled female genital mutilation in Africa and included interviews with victims, activists against female circumcision, and circumcisers, according to IMD. In 2008, Walker delivered a reading at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, to commemorate its custodianship of her archive. She also endorsed Barack Obama in his initial presidential run that year and launched her own website, alicewalkersgarden.com.

The website includes poems, stories, interviews, blog posts, and thoughts from Walker about the state of society and the need to continue the fight for racial justice. It notes that in 2008, Walker visited the Gaza Strip, a self-governing Palestinian territory on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea that borders Israel. Of the trip, Walker said:

"Going to Gaza was our opportunity to remind the people of Gaza and ourselves that we belong to the same world: the world where grief is not only acknowledged, but shared; where we see injustice and call it by its name; where we see suffering and know the one who stands



and sees is also harmed, but not nearly so much as the one who stands and sees and says and does nothing.”

In 2010, she presented the keynote address at the 11th Annual Steve Biko Lecture at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, which commemorated the slain South African activist, and where she met Biko's sons. That same year, she was also awarded the Lennon/Ono Peace Grant in Reykjavik, Iceland. She met Sean Lennon, the son of John Lennon and Yoko Ono, at the event.

A description of Walker on her website seems to best summarize who she is as a writer and human being as well as what she thinks is important today: "Walker has been an activist all of her adult life, and believes that learning to extend the range of our compassion is activity and work available to all. She is a staunch defender not only of human rights, but of the rights of all living beings."

Alice Walker's social activism is a means for her to find freedom in self-expression and to help others do the same. Alice Walker's involvement in the Civil Rights movement. Following her graduation from Sarah Lawrence College in 1965 after a successful few years there, Walker worked as a teacher and a social worker. When she was at Spelman College during the era of the Civil Rights movement (1950s and 1960s), Walker met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the key proponent of the movement, at the college. King Jr. inspired her to return to the South to be involved in Civil Rights activism in the region.

Notable instances of Walker's Civil Rights activism are her involvement in the Civil Rights movement in Mississippi in the 1960s, and her involvement in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. As suggested by the name of the march, its purpose was to obtain economic and Civil Rights for Black Americans. At this march, Dr. King Jr. gave his well-known 'I Have a Dream' speech.

“Activism is my rent for living on the planet.” said Alice Walker

The second noticeable aspect to Alice Walker's writing style is the way that she incorporates autobiographical elements into her prose in order to raise awareness to and to promote activism for the problems facing African-American women and the African-American race in general. As mentioned in the introduction, Alice was highly involved with activism in her college years. She creatively blends in the overlying message/moral that she is trying to communicate to her readers to push them to change the current situation. In Laurie McMillan's essay "Telling a Critical Story: Alice Walker's in Search of our Mothers' Gardens," she refers to Walker's effective use of autobiography to comment on important political matters and influence behaviors of the culture (McMillan 107-108). McMillan also acknowledges how this technique is especially useful for those in oppressed situations to get their opinions out, "First, autobiography allows scholars writing from traditionally marginalized positions to simultaneously assert the legitimacy of their viewpoints and challenge perspectives that have been presented as disinterested and universal" (108). In Walker's essay "Brother's and Sister's" walker talks about her own experiences with her family and what she and her brothers and sisters were taught about sex and the differences between the sexes. At the same time that Walker talks about her own experiences, the reader can pick up on underlying messages of sexism prevalent in society and in the way the African-American family operates. In her last two paragraphs of this essay Walker talks about how she wanted better male role models in



her life. The reader can infer that she is communicating better male role models for the rest of society as well when she mentions how the media portrays men as “dominator, as killer, as hypocrite” (Walker 273).

Finally, Walker’s essay “Looking for Zora is not so much an essay about the journey and experience of looking for the writer Zora Neale Huston’s grave, but it is more a commentary on how black women writers were treated and how they were unappreciated. She is showing the reader the sad reality of how African-American writers are forgotten. Every so often she will break up the events of the essay with quotes of other writers on either biography of Hurston or praise for her works. I believe she does this because is telling the world that Hurston will not be forgotten; she will live on through the words of the people who recognized her talents. In this way walkers prose is compelling and instructive. Robert Atwan comments on this aspect of Walker’s style, “...there is a strongly didactic element in Walker’s prose, and this didacticism, usually in the interest of her “womanist” project, is best served by a style that is both direct and powerful in its rhetoric” (505-506). Atwan’s conclusion about Walker’s style is absolutely true. Walker’s prose is rhetoric; it is persuasive and calls for action, but because of her writing’s elegance and beauty it does not make the reader feel like they are being told what to do, and yet the reader will still be impelled to follow her command.

When speaking about woman representation in the political fields one can say that it improving in comparison with the last years. Woman now is occupying all the domains and all the positions especially in politics. She is now a president, minister, diplomatic and parliament member. Although 40 to 50% of party members are women, they hold only about 10% of the leadership positions within those parties. Ensuring women’s equal participation in the decision-making structures of parties is essential for promoting gender equality within them. This why nowadays many international organizations like Woman Rights Organization, United Nations Development Programmers (UNDP) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in additions to many national and local institutions in all the world are trying to give woman opportunities to show her abilities to effect and change the political fields.

When speaking about woman’s role and position in any country we will find that woman is always in the second position after man. Decades before, woman was not allowed to participate in any social, political and religious ceremonies in her society and she was under the total control of man (as father, husband and brother). In all the means, woman was just a servant in the house; her only job was only to clean, cook and arise children. Today, she is an important member in her society not just as a wife or mother but also as a leader, minister and as a president.

Status of Woman in Politics: The modern global conversation around women’s rights and political participation has been taking place for almost 40 years. Recently many countries started to adopt new working programs in which they included both man and woman workers. In that period, people started to think differently and they begin to delete all forms of discrimination against woman.

According to Maurice Duverger:

“The equality of men and women in the matter of political rights is established by a large number of constitutions, codes and laws. Few indeed are the modem countries that have not proclaimed it...Many nations, which have adopted the system of representative government at a



later juncture, and whose customs and traditions maintain women in a secondary and subordinate position”

Those new activities and programs of woman participation in the political field allowed her to play variety of roles: as voter, political party member, candidate and office holder...; more importantly, woman nowadays is more involved in politics in comparison with her involvement years before.

Equality between women and men in politics in many countries in the world has grown substantially in the past fifty years. More women were elected in national parliaments than ever before and a record number of women hold executive positions within their nations“ government.

However, there is still a huge gender gap in political representation in many countries and woman is still struggling to find a place in her country especially in politics. Some researchers argue that women engage, overall, less than men in politics and political activity, others argue that woman effectiveness in politics is noticeable and can be classified among the first ranges of political leaders in any country in the world. In any institution in the world nowadays, we find that women have the right to join a political party and seek elected office in their own right. Where data are collected, the number of women candidates for national office seems to be increasing.

As we come to the activities and creative work of Alice Walker today, she still writes novels, and poems and has a website where she shares information about her new literary works and political issues she is curious about. An activist to the core, Alice Walker remains supportive of anti-war political movements and offers political commentary via her website. Enthusiasts of Walker's works can keep up-to-date with her current works, and her most recent poem to date is 'The Medicine Blow' (2022), which discusses Walker's perception of what it is to 'make medicine'- medicine for the body, medicine for the spirit.

Alice Walker - Key take aways:

- Alice Walker is an African-American author and poet born on 9th February 1944 in the rural town of Eatonton, Georgia in the United States.
- Alice Walker is best known for her novel *The Color Purple* (1982).
- Walker attended Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia in 1961 on a scholarship but decided to complete her studies at Sarah Lawrence College, New York. She graduated in 1965.
- Walker is heavily involved in activism. She has participated in the Civil Rights movement, she coined the term 'womanist', and she was part of a group that provided aid to residents in need in 2009 in the Israel-Palestinian conflict.
- The themes commonly explored in Alice Walker’s works are economic struggles, the Black family and culture, racism, violence, sexism, love, relationships amongst women/womanhood and social and political revolution.

To add more to the list of her achievements she has won both a National Book Award for one of her novels called *The Color Purple* as well as The Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. This, among the many positive reviews of her books, should be incentive enough for you to grab one of the novels that we have selected in this list about some of Alice Walker’s best books. Just enjoy every single page she has written to tell amazing stories.



Alice Walker studied for a Bachelor of Arts at Sarah Lawrence College and then did a PhD at Russell Sage College. **She currently works for Wellesley College (Massachusetts).** In her student days she belonged to the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, the first African-American sorority in the United States. **Her literary work has consisted of the composition of narratives (novels and short stories), essays and poetry.** The themes that stand out in her work are racial, gender, sexual liberation (she declares herself bisexual) and violent behavior that is rooted in society.

Racial and gender concern and commitment has accompanied her in her efforts as an author and activist. Her works on the Afro-American people, the racial question in the United States, her slave-owning past, and especially the situation of greater vulnerability in which black women found themselves not so many years ago in the country where she was born stand out.

The color purple, an epistolary novel, is his most famous work. It was published in 1982. It tells the story of Celie, **an African-American girl who has to fight not only against segregation and racism, but also against the patriarchal oppression of the black community.** All this at the dawn of the XNUMXth century. With an abusive childhood, estranged from her beloved sister Nettie, and pregnant with her own father, the author chronicles Celie's story over the decades that follow.

Some Alice Walker books

- *Everyday Use* (1973)
- *meridian* (1976)
- *Purple color* (1982)
- *the temple of my friends* (1989)
- *The secret of joy* (1992)
- *Taking the Arrow Out of the Heart* (2018)
- *Gathering Blossoms Under Fire: The Journals of Alice Walker* (2022)

In conclusion, during a long period in history, woman was not considered as equal citizens, they suffered from bad treatments, discrimination and racism under man domination and rules. In spite these problems, they could challenge them and prove themselves over the society. Woman in the past was living unequal and unfair life. She was prevented from doing any political, social and economical activities and her only job is being a housewife who takes care of home and children. At that time, woman was under the control of man who dominates all the fields in which he represents the symbol of power. After all those problems, suffering and misery woman in the entire world started to find ways to improve herself and to change her position in life. They tried also to join their efforts, dreams and wishes to form a universal idea that speaks about all women in any place in the world this leads to the appearance of Feminism.

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