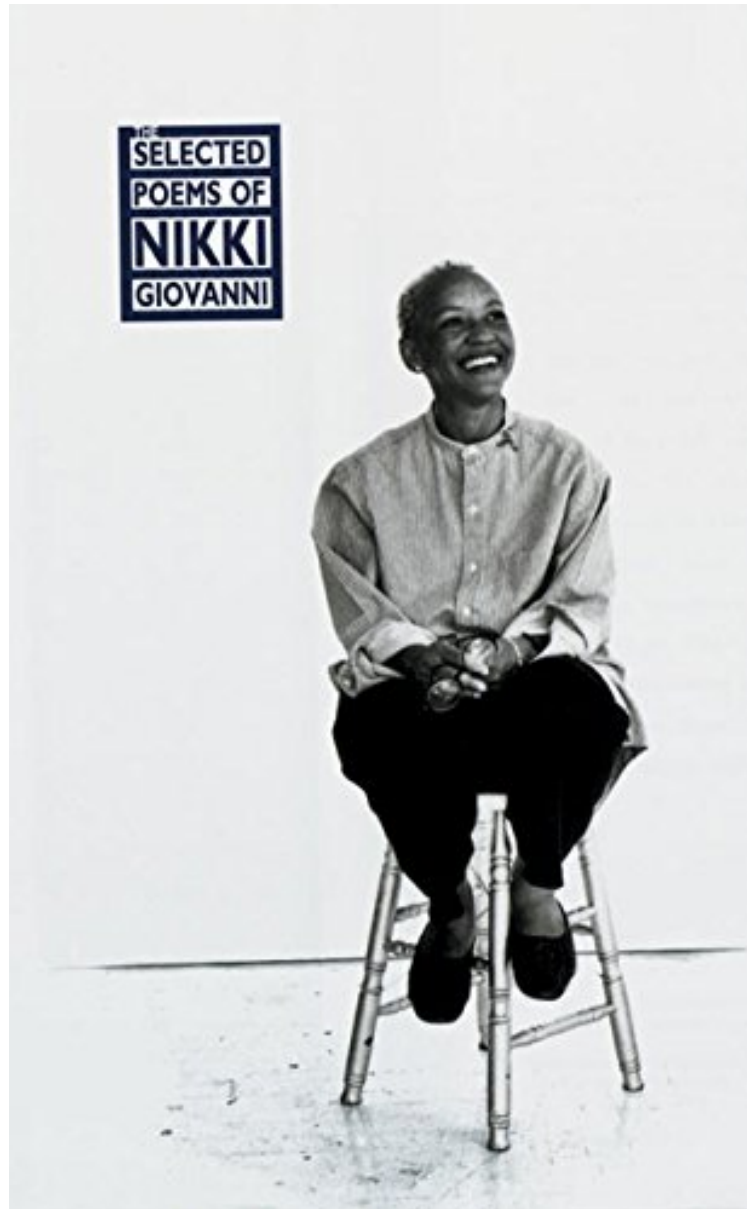


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The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni: 1968-1995

Nikki Giovanni

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When Nikki Giovanni's poems first emerged from the Black Rights Movement in the late 1960s, she immediately took a place among the most celebrated and controversial poets of the era. Finally, here is the first compilation of Nikki Giovanni's poetry. It is the testimony of a life's work from one of the commanding voices to grace America's political and poetic landscape at the end of the twentieth century.From the revolutionary "The Great Pax Whitie" and "Poem for Aretha" to the sublime "Ego Tripping" and the tender "My House," these 150 mind-speaking, truth-telling poems are at once powerful yet sensual, angry yet affirming. Arranged chronologically, they reflect the changes Giovanni has endured as a Black woman, lover, mother, teacher, and poet. Here is the evocation of a nation's past and present -- intensely personal and fiercely political -- from one of our most compassionate, outspoken observers.

From Publishers WeeklyIn the late 1960s, Giovanni emerged as one of the youngest and most controversial poets of the Black Arts Movement. She would go on to broaden her influence as an essayist, teacher, lecturer and activist. The poetry collected in this volume is arranged chronologically, gathering work from her first book, *Black Feeling, Black Talk* (1968) to the present. The poems touch on themes and events of the last four decades of the nation's history. "His headstone said/ FREE AT LAST, FREE AT LAST/ But death is a slave's freedom/ We seek the freedom of free men/ And the construction of a world/ Where Martin Luther King could have lived/ and preached non-violence" is "The Funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr" in its entirety. Giovanni's work is also deeply subjective: "I wrote a good omelet ...and ate a hot poem.../ after loving you." Springing from a strong commitment to African and African-American oral tradition, her voice is fierce, resilient, often celebratory and rooted in the vernacular of her community, whether she speaks as African American, woman, mother, writer or lover. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.From Library JournalOne of the most popular and influential poets of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Giovanni was raised in Knoxville and Cincinnati but made a name for herself in New York City by drawing a standing-room-only crowd to her first poetry reading at the jazz club Birdland in 1969. A genius at self-promotion whose work struck a responsive chord with blacks and whites, she was able to sell 10,000 copies of her first book, *Black Feeling, Black Talk* (1968)?a self-published volume?in less than a year. She has been, at times, a controversial political figure?she opposed the boycott of South Africa during the 1980s, for instance?and has continued to make a name for herself with public and TV appearances, numerous volumes of poetry, prose, and children's verse, and as a teacher and doyenne of the literary world. Her distinctive lower-case "I" ("sometimes/ when i wake up/ in the morning/ and see all the faces/ i just can't/ breathe") is a recognizable trademark, and her poems have been a potent force for young and old. For most collections.?Ellen Kaufman, Gallery Lib., Smithsonian Inst., Washington, D.C.Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.From BooklistMost "selected poems" collections are published because a poet's early volumes have gone out of print. That's not the case with Giovanni; all her major collections remain viable and extremely popular, but it's instructive and convenient to have selections from six of them gathered together in one place. This rich synthesis reveals the evolution of Giovanni's voice and charts the course of the social issues that are her muses, issues of gender and race. Giovanni has always been a topical poet and, indeed, believes that poets must write about the conflicts and injustices of their times. And what times they've been since 1968 and the publication of her first book, *Black Feeling, Black Talk* *Black Judgment*. A tireless speaker, Giovanni carries on the oral traditions of African and African American culture with her forthright and forceful voice, both live and on the page. She expresses anger and sorrow in searing poems, such as "The Great Pax Whitie" and "Woman Poem" ; then, in a completely different vein, croons passionate love in "The Way I Feel" and confides contemplative loneliness in "The December of My Springs." Giovanni's poems are like church bells, ringing out loud, clear, and true. Donna Seaman