

Introduction

In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what whites looked like. We knew only that they were different, to be feared, and in that fear was included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the employer, and the poorly dressed against the well dressed.

At the age of three, Maya and her brother were sent to live with their grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas. What was life like for a poor Black girl growing up in the segregated American South in the 1930s and 1940s? What kinds of prejudice did she experience, and how did they affect her?

Between the ages of three and sixteen, Maya also lived in St. Louis and California. She moved often, and knew good times as well as bad, kindness and great cruelty. Despite shockingly tragic childhood experiences, she managed to keep her sense of hope and achievement. This is Maya's story.

Maya Angelou (born in 1928) is a well-known Black American writer. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) is the first of five books she wrote about her life. The others are *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas* (1976), *The Heart of a Woman* (1981), and *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1988). She has also written novels, plays, poetry, movies, short stories, children's books, and magazine articles. Ms. Angelou is a life-time professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. She also lectures throughout the U.S. and the world.