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African American literature's relevance in a post-racial society raises essential questions about its continued existence. Kenneth W. Warren's What Was African American Literature? delves into this topic, exploring how the legacy of Jim Crow continues to shape American society. The notion that post-Jim Crow society is more equitable than its predecessor is a contentious claim. Warren posits that while it's true that disparities persist, the focus on proportionality and social justice has inadvertently legitimized inequality. He suggests that the emphasis on African American literature and identity serves as a class project, bolstering both black and white elites. The central dilemma of Michael Thomas's Man Gone Down is reframed by Warren to highlight the challenges of achieving success in a period of widening economic inequality. By rebranding struggle as a fight against racism, individuals can justify their pursuit of wealth as a means to achieve equality. However, Warren acknowledges limitations to the transformative powers of anti-racism, particularly in addressing economic exclusion. African American literature's significance and relevance in contemporary society are subject to debate, according to Kenneth Warren's provocative argument that "African American literature is over." Warren seeks to redefine our understanding of African American literature, moving beyond the existing parameters and definitions. His book outlines a new framework for reading and interpreting African American literary works created by black Americans during Jim Crow era. What Was African American Literature is a provocative book that challenges traditional assumptions about the role of black literature in America. Warren's work argues that African American literature should be understood as creative and critical work written by black Americans within and against the strictures of Jim Crow America. He outlines protocols of reading that best make sense of the literary works produced by African American writers and critics over the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. The book sheds light on three moments in the history of Phylon, an important journal of African American culture, where the question of whether race would disappear as an organizing literary category emerges as shared ground for critical and literary practice. Warren also points out that while scholarship by black Americans has always been the province of a petit bourgeois elite, the strictures of Jim Crow enlisted these writers in a politics that served the race as a whole. The book is a call to reevaluate our understanding of African American literature and its relationship with racism and power.

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