

Fourth National Black Writers Conference

Theme:
Black Literature in the 90's:
A Renaissance to End All Renaissances?
at
Medgar Evers College, C.U.N.Y.
March 21-24, 1996

Illustration: Power Graphics & Aesthetic Eclipse



Edison O. Jackson
President

Elizabeth Nunez
Conference Director

**Sponsored by the
Department of Languages, Literature, Communication Skills and Philosophy
Funded by The National Endowment for the Humanities**

Fourth National Black Writers Conference Committee

Elizabeth Nunez, *Conference Director*
Brenda Greene, *Conference Coordinator*

Betty Brown

Steve Cannon

Lorraine Kuziw

Andrea Loewenstein

Cheryl Williams Johnson

Louis Pogue

In addition, the conference committee was supported by the
staff and faculty of the LLCP Department,
Mary Umolu, Keith Gilyard, Glenda Taylor, Leon Johnson and Eda Hastick

Public relations provided by
Wayne Edwards

The conference was funded primarily by the
National Endowment for the Humanities

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Past NBWC Panelists and Keynote Speakers

Keynote Speakers

NBWC '86

- Maya Angelou
- Margaret Walker Alexander

NBWC '88

- Gwendolyn Brooks
- George Lamming

NWBC '91

- Alice Walker
- Ishmael Reed

Panelists at NBWC '86, '88 and '91

Doris Jean Austin
Toni Cade Bambara
Beryle Banfield
Toni Banks
Amiri Baraka
Becky Birtha
David Bradley
Claude Brown
Marie Brown
Wilfred Cartey
John Henrik Clarke
Pearl Cleage
J. California Cooper
Jayne Cortez
Stanley Crouch
Ossie Davis
Abdias Do Nascimento
Audrey Edwards
Lonne Elder III
Trey Ellis
Mari Evans
Arthur Flowers
Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Addison Gayle, Jr.

Paula Giddings
Marita Golden
Trudier Harris
William Harris
Paul Carter Harrison
Calvin Hernton
Charles Johnson
Joe Johnson
John O. Killens
George Lamming
William Luis
Haki Madhubuti
Roberto Marquez
Sharon Bell Mathis
Erroll McDonald
Nicholasa Mohr
Nancy Morejon
Walter Dean Myers
Gil Noble
Lucious Outlaw
Les Payne
Shauneille Perry
Phil Petrie
Marlene Nourbese Philip

Arnold Rampersad
Eugene Redmond
Ishmael Reed
Louis Reyes Rivera
Sonia Sanchez
Ntozake Shange
Barbara Smith
Frances-Anne Solomon
Percy Sutton
Quincy Troupe
Luz Maria Umpierre
Derek Walcott
Michele Wallace
Mary Helen Washington
Mel Watkins
Richard Wesley
John Edgar Wideman
Brenda Wilkinson
John A. Williams
Sherley Anne Williams
Cheryl Woodruff
Samuel Yette

About the College

MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE was founded in 1969 as a result of the collaborative efforts of community leaders, elected officials, the Chancellor, and the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York. Named for the late civil rights leader, Medgar Wiley Evers, the College was established with a mandate to meet the educational and social needs of the Central Brooklyn community.

The College, though still committed to the fulfillment of the founders' dream of quality higher education for the diverse population of Central Brooklyn, has expanded its scope. Today, our students represent over seventy nations of the world. They come from different socio-economic and academic backgrounds and have diverse personal and professional interests. Yet, they share one common goal: the pursuit of self-actualization. To help them realize this goal, the College offers an abundance of programs tailored to their specific needs.

Medgar Evers College awards both baccalaureate and associate degrees. It also provides certificate programs and non-credit courses for those seeking personal enrichment or enhanced career opportunities. A host of services, including counseling, tutoring, career planning, veterans' affairs and health care, ensure that students receive the academic, financial and personal support they require for a successful learning experience. Additionally, the Women's Center, Head Start Program, Ella Baker/Charles Romain Child Development Center, Middle College High School, Adult and Continuing Education Program, Caribbean Research Center, the Center for Law and Social Justice provide valuable resources for our students and the Brooklyn community. Yet the greatest resources the College provides to the community are its graduates. Medgar Evers alumni return to the community as doctors, dentists, lawyers, politicians, teachers, accountants, businessmen, nurses, artists, social workers and civic leaders.

Medgar Evers College is committed to quality in its administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni and the community it serves. The College continues to foster excellence in its academic programs and in community service.

From the Conference Director

NBWC '96 marks the Tenth Anniversary of the National Black Writers Conference which was first held at Medgar Evers College in March, 1986. We are proud of this achievement because it means that we are well on our way to becoming what our inspirational leader John O. Killens urged us to be—LONG DISTANCE RUNNERS. With NBWC '96, we celebrate the accomplishment of the first ten-mile lap in a run we expect will continue for generations to come.

There are many to thank, first and foremost the National Endowment for the Humanities, which has provided the major funding for each of the conferences. Dr. Wilsonia Cherry, former Senior Program Officer at the NEH, guided us from our first proposal submission in 1986 through the planning stages of our 1996 proposal. We are indebted to her for her vigorous support of our efforts and her unflagging faith in the value of this project. We also thank Virginia Field of the NEH for her guidance as we prepared the final revision of our NBWC '96 proposal. We are grateful for the invaluable support we have received from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Without this support, none of our conferences would have been possible.

Brenda Greene and I began planning this conference immediately after NBWC '91. We are indebted to Keith Gilyard and Steve Cannon, who brain stormed with us in long sessions as we defined our theme and the topics for this conference. Later, many others joined our team to help us select our stellar panels of writers and scholars and to identify the major issues related to Black Literature in the 1990's. We want to thank them all, especially the late Doris Jean Austin, Arthur Flowers, Linda Jackson, and Brooke Stephens. Our thanks also go to Cheryl Williams Johnson, Betty Brown, Andrea Loewenstein, Darcell Turner, Lorraine Kuziw, Mary Umolu, Marge Battle, Danish Yazdani, Louis Pogue, and Glenda Taylor who attended to the many details that were involved in making NBWC '96 a reality.

We appreciate also the opportunity to co-sponsor Paule Marshall's address with the Institute for African American Affairs at New York University. We are grateful for the tremendous support we received from Jane Gregory Rubin, Director of InterAmericas. We acknowledge Edison O. Jackson, the President of Medgar Evers College, for his encouragement and invaluable support. Finally, I extend my personal gratitude to Brenda Greene for her loyalty and commitment. We worked as a team. Without her involvement, it would have been difficult to go forward.

At NBWC '91, we discussed our concern about the alarming evidence that Black literature was gradually disappearing from bookstores and increasingly being relegated to diminishing pockets in Black Studies Departments. Our panelists offered several reasons why that was happening. Some said that there existed in Black literature a provincialism that rarely transcended issues of race, precluded the explorations of the total humanity of the Black character, and negated the diversity of American culture. Others disagreed, placing the blame on the absence of serious, critical study of Black literature, on public apathy, on a lack of interest in reading, on the decline of literacy within the Black community, and, particularly, on the politics of publishing and distribution which continue to marginalize the Black writer.

Now as we prepare for NBWC '96, evidence appears to point toward an opposite trend: the increasing visibility of Black literature in America. In 1993, NBWC '91 keynote speaker Alice Walker, NBWC '96 panelist Terry McMillan, and Toni Morrison saw their novels remain on *The*

New York Times bestsellers list at the same time for six weeks. McMillan was on the list for 38 weeks. Her novel is now the basis for a major movie hit. So is *Devil in a Blue Dress*, a novel by NBWC '96 panelist Walter Mosley. NBWC '96 panelists Jill Nelson and Bebe Moore Campbell, and NBWC '91 and '96 panelist Marita Golden were all on the bestsellers list. Additionally, since NBWC '91, when we bemoaned the absence of Black literature, two Black writers were awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature: in 1994, Toni Morrison and in 1993, Derek Walcott, NBWC '88 panelist. Since NBWC '91, also, two of our NBWC '96 panelists have received the prestigious MacArthur Award: Paule Marshall and Stanley Crouch.

A 1992 *Publishers Weekly* survey, remarking on the growing market for Black-authored books, claimed the number of bookstores "specializing in African American titles has grown from a scattered dozen to 200 or more." In a more recent *Village Voice* article (July 12, 1994) writer Nelson George puts that figure at over 400 and notes, "a major increase in the number of black-owned bookstores" and "a spread of independent black publishing and distribution."

What accounts for this explosion of interest in Black literature when at NBWC conferences from 1986-1991, scholars, writers and the general public had perceived a dismal future for Black literature? Are we witnessing a renaissance of Black literature reminiscent of the high peaks of literary art of the late 1920's, early 1930's and 1960's? Literary scholars, including Henry Louis Gates, Jr., from whose writings the title of the conference is taken (*Time*, October 10, 1994), agree that we are indeed in the midst of such a renaissance, but with a major difference. Gates contends that though the Black arts today are characterized by an awareness of previous Black traditions, Black artists are discarding the anxieties of a bygone era to presume "the universality of the black experience."

Yet it is this very presumption of universality that is a cause for skepticism among Black writers, readers and literary scholars. These writers/readers/scholars worry that the trend toward universality reflects the increasingly popular contention that racism and its effects have little or nothing to do with the impoverished conditions under which too many Black people live. Indeed, many argue that when Black writers portray the problems that Blacks encounter as problems that any non-Black person may experience, they alleviate the responsibility of those whose racist practices have been a source of oppression for Black people. Many worry that the non-Black critic/reader embraces the Black writer for this very reason.

At NBWC '96, we want to examine the issues and implications related to the growth of Black literature in the United States. Why are some Black writers flourishing while others are not? Is it true, as Gates suggests, that this growth is directly related to a trend toward the universality of the Black experience? If so, who are the readers of this new Black literature and why do they find it more appealing than traditional Black literature?

On the other hand, evidence exists that this burgeoning interest in Black literature is due to the more successful reworking of traditional Black themes. Is today's more politically aware reader responsible for the popularity of Black literature?

Our conference theme raises other issues: Can Black literature survive as a distinct form given a new trend toward universality? Is this a desirable goal for Black literature? What is lost if this goal is pursued? An interesting corollary to this question is to examine the reasons why Black writers during the African American literary renaissance of the 1930's sought exile from the

U.S. What were the central themes of these writers? Why did so many of them, including James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Chester Himes, find a wider readership outside of the United States? Who were their readers in the United States? In what ways do the tastes of today's readers differ from the tastes of readers in previous renaissances?

Interestingly, today many Black writers from other countries choose to write and live in the United States. Why do readers in the United States embrace their works? It is because these writers have achieved the universality that Gates predicts? Or is it, as Bryten Breytenback suggests, because American readers are attracted to the exotic elements in their works, an exoticism that these Black writers deliberately cultivate in order to widen their readership? (*New York Times*, 3/8/93).

Finally, the conference will examine issues related to the publishing industry: Who are the publishers of Black literature? Is there a distinction between the content and perspective of Black literature published by mainstream publishers and those published by small presses?

I believe that, as at previous NBWC conferences, you will find the panel discussions at NBWC '96 thought provoking and stimulating. It is our goal to foster such dialogues and debates among writers, readers and critics. Our target audience is you, the general public, the lover of literature, particularly of Black literature. We welcome your views.

I encourage you to visit the conference bookstore. I am certain that nowhere else will you find such a varied selection of books by and about Black people.

Thank you for being here.

Best Wishes,
Elizabeth Nunez, Ph.D.
NBWC Conference
Director

Summary of Panels

Panel A1: Choosing Exile: Black Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts Movement

This panel will examine reasons why during the Harlem Renaissance through the 1940's and 1950's, certainly one of the high points of Black literary achievement, many major Black writers chose to leave the United States, seeking exile in Europe, particularly France. The panel will explore the merits of Alan Locke's contention that because the works of these writers were inherently political, they failed to raise Black literature to "adulthood." Many also claim that it was the political content of these works with its emphasis on racial oppression that alienated many readers. This panel will examine these issues in the light of the popularity of Black literature in the 90's which may or may not project such politics.

Panel A2: Choosing Exile: Black Writers from the Black Arts Movement to the Renaissance of the 1990's

In the period covered by this panel, the majority of Black writers who sought and are seeking exile are not citizens of the United States. What accounts for their popularity in the United States? Is it because their works are less political and more universal than the works of African American writers? Critic Bruce King disagrees. He contends that while African and West Indian writing in the homeland may dwell on domestic issues, the Black writer who lives overseas continues to develop older themes concerning his/her colonial heritage and resulting injustices. ("Caribbean Conundrum," *TRANSITION*. 62 [1993], 142).

On the other hand, many of the African American contemporaries of these writers whose themes are also political do not enjoy similar popularity in the U.S. nor are their works published by mainstream publishers. What accounts for this disparity? Is it the appeal of the exotic, as Breten Breytenbach contends? And is there evidence that foreign Black writers often resort to "fantastic plots and bizarre characters," because, as Abdelraham Munif contends in "Exile and the Writer," "the market requires [them to] deliver something new and different than other writers it has already heard from"?

Panel B1

Presuming the Universality of the Black Experience

This panel will examine definitions of universality, exploring whether universality is a desirable, or, indeed, an achievable goal for Black literature. It is desirable because literature that has relevance to a broad audience is more meaningful, and, therefore, more successful? Is not universality a desirable objective for all literature? On the other hand, does the theme of universality have the undesirable effect of easing the conscience of a society responsible for the historic oppression of Black people? Perhaps a more important question is: Is universality an achievable goal when one writes truthfully about the Black experience? Many writers/critics/readers argue that the racial oppression historically endured by Black people is one that has characterized them uniquely, and, therefore, while there are aspects of the Black experience that have universal application, there are others that do not and cannot. To understand the pride and rage of the Black feminist, for example, one has to understand the history of racism against Blacks; to understand the problems in domestic/social/romantic relationships within the Black community, this understanding of racism is also essential. It is in this context that one finds illuminating Toni Morrison's remarks that literature that has no political influence is "tainted."

This panel will also examine the basis for the "anxieties" of Black writers who continue to write within the Black literary tradition and the reasons why, according to Henry Louis Gates Jr., writers in the 90's are discarding such "anxieties". Is it true, as he suggests, that the discarding of such "anxieties" is directly related to the "boom" in the interest in Black literature? What are the consequences of a Black writer "at ease" in a society that assuredly has not reached the ideal of political correctness?

Panel B2

Politically Correct in a Politically Incorrect World

This panel will explore whether the wide reception of Black literature today is indeed due to a change in the political consciousness and social conscience of American society. Is our society less racist, less sexist, that is, do we live in a "politically correct" world where "politically correct" works are no longer necessary or desirable? Or is our society still politically incorrect, and if so, what is the status of politically correct Black literature? Is there also an explosion in interest in "politically correct" Black literature, though more often than not such works are published by small presses with limited distribution? This panel will examine the political issues raised by these works and will recast the question posed at our first conference in 1986: Does the Black writer have a responsibility to his/her community? Further, this panel will explore questions related to the contention that Black literature constitutes a distinct genre that sets it apart from American literature.

Panel C1 Black Literature: Who are the Readers?

This panel will explore the emerging explosion of a Black readership on the heels of Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*. There is no question that this novel reached groups of people who perhaps never read a full-length work in their lives. This panel will explore the reason for the accessibility of novels such as this one and the implications for future trends in Black literature. Who are our new readers and what accounts for this new readership? Have we redefined the Black literary tradition? Have we created new Black images? Has this broadening of Black literature created new classifications of Black literature or has it just widened the gap between the literature read by the masses and the literature read by writers, academics, scholars, and critics? Can we find a way to get more people reading a wider range of literature? This panel of writers and scholars will discuss the issues generated by these questions.

Panel C2 Black Literature: The Politics of Publishing

This panel will explore the current growth of the Black Press and the reasons for this phenomenon. Critics claim that because the themes and images in the works of some Black writers are counter to perceived popular notions, their works are rejected by mainstream publishers. Whereas in the past these Black writers sought exile abroad, they now turn to the Black press or self-publishing. Critics also claim that the success of Black literature in the 90's is due to a readership that is more politically aware and more concerned with issues of the preservation of the Black cultural heritage. This panel will explore the validity of these assumptions, as well as the future viability of the Black Press. Is the popularity of works published by the Black press a transitory fad, and thus, can one conclude that the success of the Black press is transitory? This panel will explore issues related the stability of the Black press as well as the under-representation of Blacks on the editorial staff of mainstream publications.

NBWC '96 Conference Schedule

Thursday, March 21

- 5:00 p.m. On-Site Registration
Medgar Evers College
- 6:00 p.m. Welcome Reception and Book Fair
- 7:00 p.m. Conference Opening
- M.C.** Elizabeth Nunez
Conference Director
- Processional** Babatunde Olatunji Drummers
- Welcome** Edison O. Jackson
President of Medgar Evers College
- Remarks** Walter Mosley
- Keynote Address** **Amiri Baraka**

Friday, March 22

- 5:00 p.m. Book Fair at New York University
Vanderbilt Hall - Tishman Auditorium
- 7:00 p.m. Keynote Address
Paule Marshall
Tishman Auditorium - NYU

Saturday, March 23

- 8:00 a.m. On-Site Registration
(ongoing at Medgar Evers College)

SATURDAY MORNING PANELS

March 23, 1996

All Saturday Panels held at Medgar Evers College

PANEL A1

- Time:** 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 Noon
Location: Carroll Gym

*Choosing Exile:
Black Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Arts
Movement*

- Panelists:** Houston Baker
Maryse Condé
John A. Williams
Yelena Khanga
Eugene Redmond

- Moderator:** Don Quinn Kelley

PANEL A2

- Time:** 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 Noon
Location: Bedford Auditorium

*Choosing Exile:
Black Writers from the Black Arts Movement to the 1990s*

- Panelists:** Stephanie Martin
Selwyn Cudjoe
Cecil Foster
Kenneth Ramchand
Lorna Goodison

- Moderator:** Ismith Khan

LUNCH

Readings by Writers:

*12:45 p.m. - 1:45 p.m.
Terry McMillan in the Carroll Gym
and
Ishmael Reed in the Bedford Auditorium*

SATURDAY AFTERNOON PANELS

March 23, 1996

PANEL B1

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Location: Carroll Gym

*Presuming the Universality
of the Black Experience*

Panelists: Kelvin Christopher James
Hugh Pearson
Marita Golden
Stanley Crouch

Moderator: Keith Gilyard

PANEL B2

Time: 2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Location: Bedford Auditorium

*Politically Correct in a Politically
Incorrect World*

Panelists: Barbara Christian
Arthur Flowers
Thulani Davis
Ishmael Reed
Karla FC Holloway

Moderator: Sheila Mayers-Johnson

PANEL C1

Time: 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Location: Bedford Auditorium

Black Literature: Who Are the Readers?

Panelists: Bebe Moore Campbell
William Cook

Brent Staples
Jill Nelson
Sherley Anne Williams

Moderator: Zala Chandler

PANEL C2

Time: 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Location: Carroll Gym

Black Literature: The Politics of Publishing

Panelists: Marimba Ani
Paul Coates
Malaika Adero
Susan McHenry
Terry McMillan

Moderator: Norman Loftis

6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

RECEPTION

7:30 p.m. - until
*Readings by published
and unpublished writers*

Sunday, March 24

SUNDAY CONFERENCE WRAP-UP

March 24, 1996

10:00 a.m. - 12:00 Noon

Panelists: All panel moderators
(Department of Languages, Literature,
Communication Skills and Philosophy)

Moderator: Elizabeth Nunez
Conference Director

Special rates for **August Wilson's Seven Guitars** on Saturday,
March 23rd at 8:00 p.m. Call (212) 246-4047. Mention the conference.

Biographical Sketches and Photographs of Conference Panelists and Key Staff



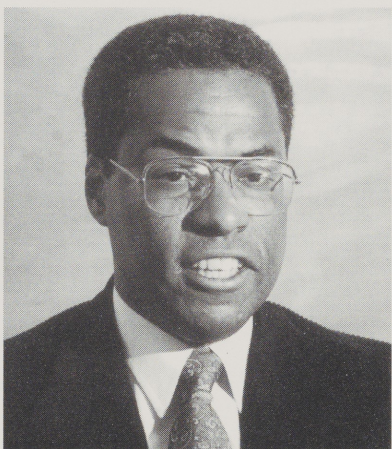
Malaika Adero has had extensive experience in publishing. She is currently the Executive Editor at Amistad Press. Other positions she has held are Editor for *Fireside* (Simon and Schuster), Editor for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Editorial Assistant for the New American Library. Among the books that she has edited are *Up South: Stories, Studies and Letters of This Century's African-American Migrations*; *The Beautiful Nubian Baby Book*; *Miles, The Autobiography* by Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe; *Gotta Have It* by Spike Lee; *Mo' Better Blues* by Spike Lee and Lisa Jones; *Gone with the Wind: The Book, The Movie, The Legend* by Herb Bridges; and *In the Spirit: The Inspirational Writings of Susan L. Taylor* by Susan L. Taylor.

Adero is the recipient of the Tony Godwin Award for Editors and a 1995 Jerusalem International Book Fair Editorial Fellow.

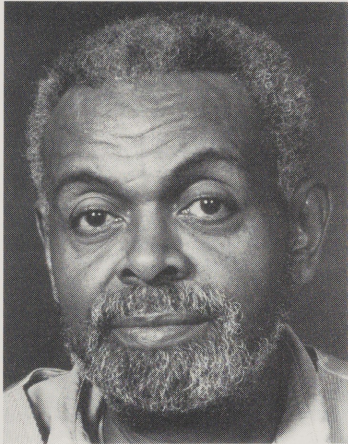


Professor Marimba Ani's published works include the essays: "The Ideology of European Dominance," "European Mythology: The Ideology of Progress," "The Nyama of the Blacksmith: The Metaphysical Significance of Metallurgy in Africa," "The African 'Aesthetic' and National Consciousness," and two books *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1980) and *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (1994).

Ani holds a BA degree in philosophy from the University of Chicago and the MA and Ph.D. degree in anthropology from the New School For Social Research. She is a professor of African Studies at Hunter College in New York City and the Director of the Afrikan Heritage Afterschool Program in Harlem.



Houston A. Baker Jr., is an Albert M. Greenfield Professor of Human Relations and the Director of the Center for the Study of Black Literature and Culture at the University of Pennsylvania. He received his undergraduate degree, *magnum cum laude*, from Howard University, Washington, D.C., and his graduate degrees from the University of California at Los Angeles. Baker is the author, editor, and co-editor of several books: *Long Black Song, Essays in Black Literature and Culture*; *Singers of Daybreak: Studies in Black American Literature*; *Reading Black: Essays in the Criticism of African-Caribbean, and Black American Literature*; *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*; *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*; *Workings of the Spirit: A Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing and Black Studies, Rap and the Academy*.



A Newark, New Jersey native, Amiri Baraka has had a long, storied career as an activist and writer. He first gained national attention in 1964 with his powerful dramatic play, *Dutchman*. This was followed by a series of major productions over the next eight years, which included *The Toilet* (1964), *The Slave* (1965), *The Death of Malcolm X* (1968), and *Four Black Revolutionary Plays* (1969). Baraka's volumes of poetry include *Black Art* (1967), *It's Nation Time* (1968), and *Afrikan Revolution* (1973). His nonfiction publications include *Home* (1965), *Black Music* (1967), *A Black Value System* (1970), and *The Autobiography of Leroy Jones/Amiri Baraka* (1984). He is currently working on two new books *Jesse Jackson and Black People: Essays on Jackson & Afro-American Political Movement Since 1972* and *Eulogies*, a book of eulogies he has given in the last twenty-five years for people like Miles Davis, James Baldwin, Dizzy Gillespie, Sun Ra, William Kunstler, and people in the Newark community.



Bebe Moore Campbell is the mutli-talented author of *Brothers and Sisters*, *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, *Sweet Summer: Growing Up With and Without My Dad*, and *Successful Women/Angry Men, the two Career Marriage*. Her writings can be found in many publications including: *MS.*, *Working Mother*, *Ebony*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Seventeen*, *Parents* and *Glamour*. She is a recipient of numerous awards including the National Endowment for the Arts Literature Grant, the Mayor's Certificate of Appreciation (from Mayor Tom Bradley of Los Angeles), the 1994 NAACP Image Award, in the fiction category, for her novel, *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*. She is a regular commentator for *Morning Edition*, on National Public Radio.



Zala Chandler is Professor of English and Women's Studies in the Department of Languages, Literature and Philosophy at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York. She has authored several articles on South Africa, and she is a founding member of Sisters in Support of Sisters in South Africa (S.I.S.A). A graphic artist, she recently completed writing and illustrating a children's book, *Timothy Chooses An African Name*. Her interview, "Voices Beyond the Veil: An Interview with Toni Cade Bambara and Sonia Sanchez" appears in the award-winning *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afro-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance* by Braxton and McLaughlin. Her research and lectures have included women of the Caribbean and Central America, an outgrowth of her work as the co-chair of the Board of MADRE. She is currently writing short stories about the personal triumphs of black women.



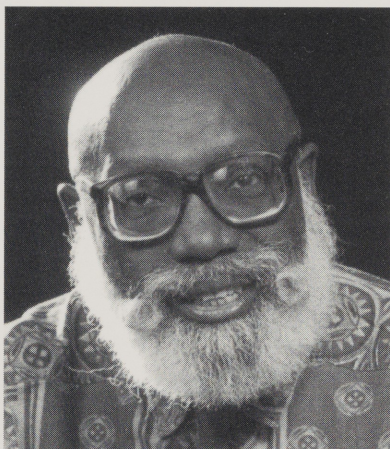
Barbara Christian is Professor of African American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where she has taught since 1971. She is the author of *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition 1982-1976*, which won the Before Columbus American Award; *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1985); A Monarch Note on Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. She co-authored the prize-winning *In Search of Our Past; 6 Units for the Teaching of a Multi-Ethnic Women's History*. Most recently she has published essays on the state of theory, *The Race for Theory and Fixing Methodologies: The Case of 'Beloved.'*



Paul Coates is founder and director of Black Classic Press (1978-present). Coates was formerly the African American Studies reference acquisitions librarian at Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. He is the co-editor of *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors: Preservers of Black History*. He is a founding member and chair of the National Association of Black Book Publishers. He is currently an adjunct instructor of African American Studies at Sojourner-Douglass College, Baltimore, MD.



Maryse Condé, a native of Guadeloupe, studied at the Université de Paris III, Sorbonne, graduating *docteur ès lettres* in comparative literature. Her novels include *The Children of Segou*; *A Season in Rihata*; *Segu*; *La Vie scélérate*; *Moi, Tituba, sorcière noire de Salem*; *Pays Mélé, suivi de Nanna-ya*; and most recently, *Crossing the Mangrove* (Anchor, Doubleday 1995). Not surprisingly, Condé has been the recipient of several scholarly fellowships, including a Fulbright at Occidental College, Los Angeles; a Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Writer-In-Residence; and a J.S. Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship.



William W. Cook is the Chair of the English Department and Israel Evans Professor of Oratory and Belles Lettres at Dartmouth College. Professor Cook is the author of *Flight to Canada* and *Hudson Hornet and Other Poems*. His critical works include *Writing in the Spaces Left*; *Ellison's Modern Odysseus*; *The Black Arts Poets*; *Mom, Dad, and God: Sex Roles in Black Drama*; *Swim: Cultural Separatism in Contemporary Black Literature*; and *What Rough Beast: Modern African Novelists*.



Stanley Crouch's collection of essays and reviews, *Notes of a Hanging Judge*, was nominated for an award in criticism by the National Book Critics Circle and was selected by the Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook as the best book of essays published in 1990. In 1993, he was the recipient of both the Jean Stein Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the MacArthur Foundation grant. His most recent publication is *The All-American Skin Game*. He is currently working on a biography of Charlie Parker, a collection of jazz essays and reviews, and his epic novel, *First Snow In Kokomo*, should appear in 1997. He is presently, writing the scripts for an eight-part television miniseries entitled *Jazz: The Music, The People, The Myth*. He has served as Artistic Consultant for jazz programming at Lincoln Center since 1987.



Selwyn Cudjoe is a Professor of Africana Studies at Wellesley College where he teaches Afro-American Literature, African Literature, Black Women Writers and Caribbean Literature. He obtained both the B.A. and the M.A. degrees in English and American Literature from Fordham University in 1969 and 1972, and in 1976 he received a Ph.D. in American Literature from Cornell University.

Professor Cudjoe is the author of *V.S. Naipaul: A Materialist Reading* (1988), *Movement of the People: Essays on Independence* (1983), *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (1980), and *The Role of Resistance in the Caribbean Novel* (1976). He has also edited *Caribbean Women Writers* (1990), *Eric Williams Speaks* (1993), and co-edited *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacy* (1994).



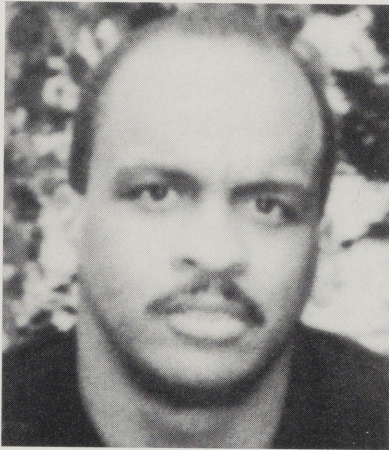
Thulani Davis's work as a writer includes theater, journalism, fiction and poetry. She is the author of the novel, *1959*, and *Malcom X, The Photographs* (1993). She published two volumes of Poetry: *Playing the Changes* and *All the Renegade Ghosts Rise*. Davis wrote the libretto for the acclaimed opera, *X, The Life and Times of Malcom X*, by Anthony Davis. Davis's other work in theater and music collaborations include the 1990 adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Circle*, and the libretto for Anne Lebaron's opera, *The E. & O. Line*. Her most recent theater works are the plays, *Miss Ruby's Blues: Story of a Murder in Florida* and *Ava & Cat in Mexico*. From 1993-1995 Davis was a PEW/TCG Resident Fellow with the New York Shakespeare Festival.



Arthur Flowers, a Memphis native, attended Memphis State University and the City University of New York. He has taught writing workshops at the City University of New York and New York University. He is a Vietnam veteran, blues singer, and co-founder of the New Renaissance Writers Guild, NYC. He is currently the Director of The Griot Shop, Memphis, TN. His works include *De Mojo Blues* (1986) and *Another Good Loving Blues* (1993). Works in progress include *No Rest For The Weary* and *The Hoodoo Book of Flowers*. Flowers is a recipient of a National Endowment for The Arts fellowship award.



Cecil Foster was born in Barbados and moved to Canada in 1978. His novels *No Man in the House* and *Sleep on Beloved* were published to critical acclaim in the United States and Canada. Since leaving his position of senior editor at the *Financial Post*, Foster has worked for CBC radio and television and has written for several leading magazines.



A former faculty member at Medgar Evers College, Keith Gilyard is Professor of English and Director of the Writing Program at Syracuse University. His articles on language and literature have appeared in numerous publications, among them *African American Review*, *Before Columbus Review*, and *College English*. He received an American Book Award for his 1991 collection of essays and memoirs, *Voices of the Self*. His volume of poetry, *American Forty*, was published in 1993. Gilyard recently completed a book of essays entitled *Let's Flip the Script: An American Discourse on Language, Literature, and Learning* and also *Spirit & Flame: An Anthology of African American Poetry*. Both books are due to be published in 1996.



Marita Golden is the author of the classic memoir, *Migrations of the Heart*, the novels, *A Woman's Place*, *Long Distance Life*, and *Do Remember Me* and the book *Saving Our Sons: Raising Black Children in a Turbulent World*. She is editor of the anthology *Wild Women Don't Wear No Blues: Black Women Writers on Love, Men, and Sex* and co-editor with Susan Shreve of *Skin Deep*, a collection of fiction and nonfiction on the subject of race by black and white women writers. Golden is also completing a novel.

Golden holds the position of Senior Writer in the MFA Graduate Writing Program at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia. She is also the founder of the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Award for emerging African American college fiction writers, underwritten by HarperCollins Publishers.



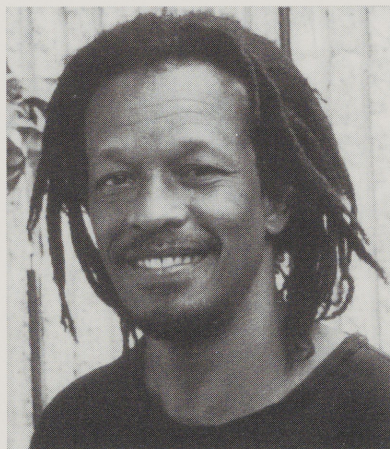
Lorna Goodison's work has been included in all the anthologies and collections of Caribbean poetry published in the West Indies, Europe and the United States (and has just appeared in the Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces). Goodison opened the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies Conference in 1989 in England with Derek Walcott; she was the only anglophone Caribbean writer at the Celebration of the Arts in Latin America in Montreal in 1990. And in 1992, she was the keynote speaker at a special celebration of Haitian Art and Culture-*Espoir d'Haiti* in Detroit. Her works include *Baby Mother* and *The King of Swords* (short stories), *Tamarind Season*, *I Am Becoming My Mother*, *Heartease*, and a volume of *Selected Poems*. Her latest book is *To Us All Flowers Are Roses* (1995).



Brenda M. Greene is Professor of English Studies at Medgar Evers College, CUNY, where she chairs the Department of Literature, Languages, & Philosophy and teaches Composition and literature. Her research interests are in the areas of composition, multicultural literature, and writing across the curriculum. She has conducted workshops, presented papers, and published in those areas. Professor Greene is currently conducting research on the literature of contemporary women of color. She is Conference Coordinator for the Fourth National Black Writers Conference.



Karla F.C. Holloway, a Professor of English and African American Literature at Duke University, is the author of three books--on Zora Neale Hurston, (*The Character of the Word*), Toni Morrison (*New Dimensions of Spirituality*), and her most recent work on black women writers in West Africa and the United States, *Moorings and Metaphors*. Both *New Dimensions of Spirituality* and *Moorings and Metaphors* were awarded "Outstanding Academic Book" by *Choice Magazine*. Her work in literary theory focuses on black women writers, especially their uses of language, the cultural connections within their works, and their poetic recreations of a woman-centered ancestry. Her new book *Codes of Conduct: Reflections on Ethics and Ethnicity* blends autobiography, literary theory, and cultural studies, considering the way in which our contemporary culture both challenges and encourages ethnic identity.



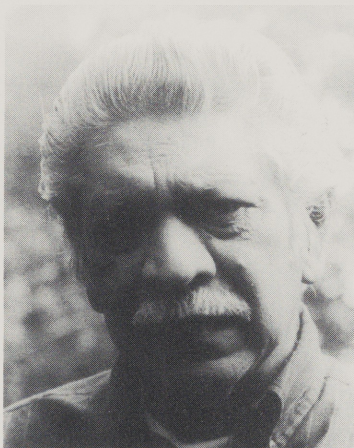
Kevin Christopher James was born in Trinidad. He holds a B.S. from the University of the West Indies and a doctorate in science education from Columbia University. His short stories have appeared in *Between C&D*, *BOMB*, *American Letters and Commentary*, *Quattro*, *The Portable Lower East Side*, *The Literary Review*, and *Les Jungles d'Amerique*. In 1989, he won a New York Foundation for Arts fellowship in fiction. His books include *Jumping Ship and Other Stories* (1992) and a novel, *Secrets* (1993).



Sheila Mayers-Johnson completed her undergraduate work in Psychology at City College of the City University of New York and earned her doctorate in Counseling Psychology at Arizona State University. She has taught at the graduate level in Counselor Education at Rhode Island College, and at the undergraduate level in Black Studies at Brown University. She has also chaired the Department of Black Studies at San Francisco State University. Her research interests are in the areas of Black language and cognition, as well as ritual and personal transformation. She is currently at work on a book entitled, *Rituals for All Seasons* and is completing research for another work on cross-cultural psychology. She is a member of the new and developing Department of Interdisciplinary Studies at Medgar Evers College.



Historian and media artist, Don Quinn Kelley has lived a varied professional life. He has done fieldwork with anthropologist Margaret Mead and made film and video documentaries for the United Nations, Ron Dellums, Kenneth Clark and others. His work in media and print shows a passion for human rights and world peace in North America, art and politics in Burkino Faso, carnival and revolution in Nicaragua, the liberation struggle in South Africa, and Christian-Marxist dialogue in Eastern Europe. For the past five years, Dr. Kelly has pioneered interactive computer-based multimedia curriculum in African Studies, American history, and the history of ancient civilizations. Currently, he holds a joint appointment as Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, and Professor of History in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York.



Ismith Khan received his undergraduate degree from the New School of Social Research and his graduate degree from John Hopkins University. His published works include *The Jumbie Bird*, *The Obeah Man* and *Crucifixion*. His short stories can be found in such publications as the *Colorado Quarterly*, *New Voices*, *New Writings in the Caribbean*, *Manjari*, and *Language for Living*.



Yelena Khanga served as a general assignment reporter covering a wide range of political and economic issues for the Moscow News. Ms. Khanga was selected as the first Soviet journalist in an exchange program between American and Soviet Media. She has appeared on "Vsglyad" (former Soviet Union), "20/20," NBC's "Today Show," "Posner/Donahue" (CNBC), PBS's "McNeil/Lehrer News Hour" and CNN's "Sonya Live" and "International Hour." She has authored *Soul To Soul... The Story of a black Russian American Family 1865-1992* (W.W. Norton, 1992). In it she traces her family roots spanning three continents, America, Europe and Africa. Her other publications include "No Matreshkas Need Apply" (*New York Times*, November, 1991), and "Overrun By Ugly Americans" (*New York Times*, August, 1994).



Norman Loftis is an Associate Professor at Medgar Evers College. He holds a B.A. from Fisk University, M.A. and Ph.D. in Literature from Columbia University and a M.F.A. in film also from Columbia University. He is the author of several books including *Black America* (poetry), *Life Force* (fiction), *From Barbarism to Decadence* (essays) and *Condition Zero* (philosophy). His films include *Shaman*, *Small Time*, and *Messenger*.



Paule Marshall, one of America's leading black women writers, is the author of *Daughters; Praisesong for the Widow; Brown Girl, Brownstones; The Chosen Place, The Timeless People; Reena and Other Stories* and *Soul Clap Hands and Sing*. She is a professor of English at New York University where she holds the Helen Gould Sheppard Professor of Literature and Culture Chair. She is a recipient of the prestigious MacArthur fellowship. She lives in Richmond, Virginia, and New York City.



Stephanie Martin was born and raised in Jamaica. She is a visual artist and co-founder of Sister Vision Press, the first and only women of color publishing house in Canada. She brings to her panel the point of view of a publisher of writers "in exile". Ms. Martin lives in Toronto.



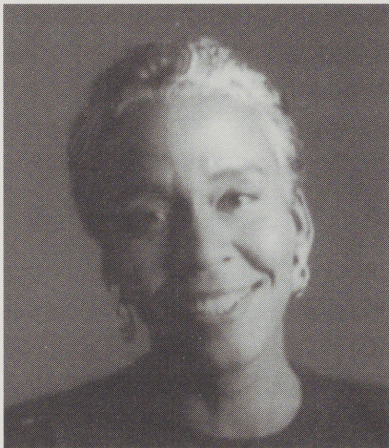
In her 17 years in magazine publishing, Susan McHenry has been a key editor at magazines that have pioneered reaching new audiences of sophisticated readers among women and among African Americans. She spent nine years as an editor at *Ms.*, where her own cultural commentary won a Newswomen's Club of New York Front Page Award for best magazine column. In 1989, she anchored the start-up editorial team of *Emerge* as its first managing editor. Most recently, McHenry was a senior editor at *Working Woman*. She is now completing a book, *Do Your Work: African American Women Professionals as 21st-Century Role Models*. McHenry earned a B.A. with honors in American history and literature from Harvard-Radcliff, a masters degree in literature from Boston University, and was a 1987-88 Knight-Bagehot Fellow in Business and Economics Journalism at Columbia University. She is executive editor of *Quarterly Black Review of Books*.



Terry McMillan received her B.A. in Journalism from the University of California at Berkeley, and attended the MFA Film Program at Columbia University. McMillan's first novel, *Mama*, published in 1987, received a National Book Award by the Before Columbus Foundation. She has been awarded a 1988 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in literature, a 1986 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship, and the Doubleday/Columbia University Literary Fellowship. She was a three-time fellow at Yaddo Artist Colony and The MacDowell Colony. She has been a Visiting Professor of English at the University of Wyoming and Stanford University and an Associate Professor of English at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Her novel, *Disappearing Acts*, was published in 1989. She has also edited and compiled an anthology of contemporary African-American fiction entitled *Breaking Ice*, published in 1990. Her novel, *Waiting to Exhale* (1992) was recently adapted to the much acclaimed movie of the same title.



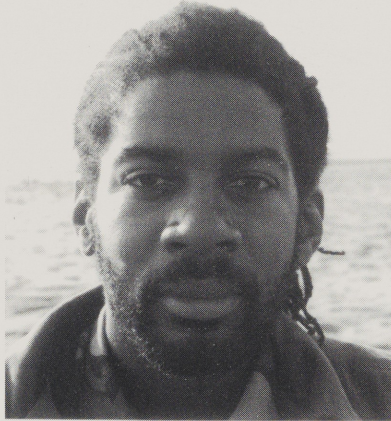
Walter Mosley has earned critical acclaim as well as dedicated fans stretching from Southern California all the way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. His quartet of Easy Rawlins novels, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, which was adapted to the much acclaimed movie starring Denzel Washington, *A Red Death*, *White Butterfly* and *Black Betty*, has provided a unique perspective on American life. His mysteries have brought alive the multi-racial reality of postwar Los Angeles in all its richness, sprawl and divisiveness. Last August he published his first non-mystery called *RL'S Dream*, whose hero, Soupspoon Wise, is an aging Mississippi Delta bluesman who once played with the legendary "RL" or Robert Johnson. Mosley is currently working on two more Easy Rawlins sequels: *A Little Yellow Dog* and *Bad Boy Bobby Brown*.



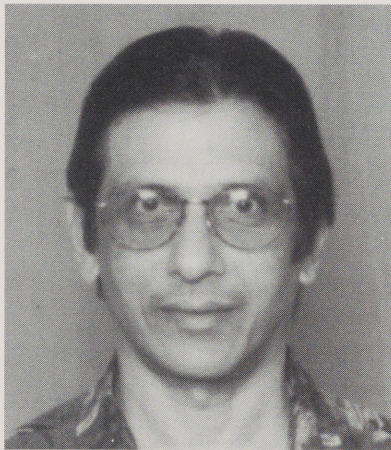
Jill Nelson is a native New Yorker and a graduate of the City College of New York and the Columbia School of Journalism. A journalist for almost twenty years, her work has appeared in numerous publications including *Essence*, *The Nation*, *Ms.*, *The New York Times*, and *The Village Voice*. She was a staff writer for *The Washington Post Magazine* during its first four years of existence and was named Washington D.C. Journalist of the Year for her work there. She wrote the highly acclaimed memoir, *Volunteer Slavery: My Authentic Negro Experience* and has authored a forthcoming collection of essays, *Straight, No Chaser*, which will be published by Putnam in the fall of 1996.



NBWC Conference Director Elizabeth Nunez is a professor of English at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York, and Director of the College's Honors Program. A native of Trinidad, Nunez has published articles on Caribbean writers including Jean Rhys, Phyllis Shand Alfrey, Jamaica Kincaid, Merle Hodge, V.S. Naipaul and George Lamming. She is the author of the novel *When Rocks Dance* (Putnam 1986, Ballantine 1992). She directed the National Black Writers Conference sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1986, 1988, 1991 and 1996. She received her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in English from New York University.



Hugh Pearson is the author of *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (1994), a book about the life of Huey Newton and three ex-Black Panthers who were rank and file members of the party. His book received rave reviews in the *New York Daily News*, *Newsday*, and *The New York Times Book Review*. Pearson currently resides in New York City.



Kenneth Ramchand, a native of Trinidad and Tobago, has a M.A. and Ph.D. from Edinburgh University. He is a Senior Fulbright Fellow (1980-1981) and a Guggenheim Fellow (1984-1985). Ramchand holds the distinguished honor of being the first Professor of West Indian Literature at the University of the West Indies. He was a Visiting Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at Colgate University, Colgate, New York.

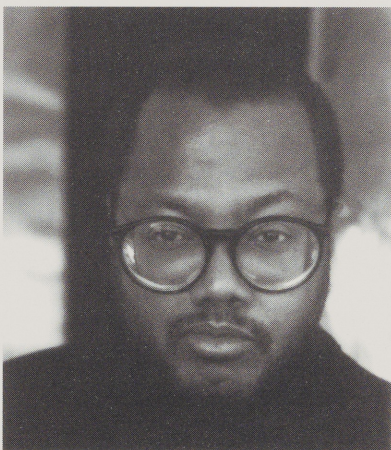
Ramchand is the author of *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (1970), *An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature* (1976), and numerous articles in international journals: *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Ariel*, *Callaloo*, *Wasafiri*, *CRNLE*, and *Sewanee Review*. He is the general editor of Mac Millan's four-part *History of West Indian Literature*.



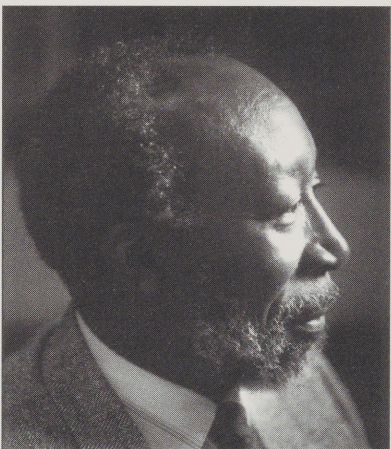
Eugene Redmond is a Professor of English at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. He was named a 1993 winner of the American Book Award for excellence in multi-cultural literature for his poetry collection, *The Eye In The Ceiling*. Redmond has seven published books of poetry, including *Sentry of the Four Golden Pillars*, *Consider Loneliness as These Things*, and *River of Bones and Flesh and Blood*. His publications include criticism, notably *Drumvoices: The Mission of Afro-American Poetry*. He is the editor of *Drumvoices Revue*, Associate Editor of *Literati Internazionale* and *The Original Chicago Blues Annual*, and Permanent Contributing editor of *The Pushcart Prize: The Best of the Small Presses*.



Ishmael Reed grew up in working class neighborhoods in Buffalo, New York. He attended Buffalo public schools and the University of Buffalo. As well as being a novelist, poet, and essayist, he is a songwriter, television producer, publisher, magazine editor, playwright, and founder of the Before Columbus Foundation and There City Cinema, both of which are located in northern California. Two of his books have been nominated for National Book Awards, and Reed has received numerous honors, fellowships, and prizes, including the Lewis H. Michaux Literary Prize, awarded to him in 1978 by the Studio Museum in Harlem. He has taught at Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth, and for twenty years he has been a lecturer at the University of California at Berkeley. He lives in Oakland, California. Two albums of his songs, *Conjure I: Music for the Texts of Ishmael Reed* and *Conjure II: Cab Calloway Stands in for the Moon* have been released by Pangaea Records. His works include three collections of essays, *Writin' is Fightin'*, *God Made Alaska for the Indians*, *Shrovetide in New Orleans*; novels such as *Mumbo Jumbo*, *Flight to Canada*, *The Free-Lance Pall Bearers*, *Reckless Eyeballing*, and *The Terrible Threes*; and the poetry volumes *Catechism of D Neoamerican Hoodoo Church*, *A Secretary to the Spirits*, *Chattanooga*, *Conjure*, and *New & Collected Poems*.



Brent Staples has a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Chicago and writes editorials on politics and culture for *The New York Times*. His memoir *Parallel Time: Growing Up in Black and White* (1994) was on the *The New York Times* Bestsellers List. Staples also has works published in *Reporting: The Chicago Journal*, *The Reader*, *Chicago Magazine*, *Downbeat Magazine*, *Jazz Hot-Paris*, *The Museum of Contemporary Art*, and *The Chicago Sun-Times*.



The author of 12 novels, eight nonfiction books and editor or co-editor of ten other books, John A. Williams is a Distinguished Professor of English and Journalism at Rutgers University's Newark Campus. Among his novels are: *!Click Song*, *The Junior Bachelor Society*, and *The Man Who Cried / Am*. Williams, who lives in Teaneck, New Jersey, is completing his 13th novel, *There Will Come Thunder*; and is mid-way through yet another, *The Book Without Title*.



Sherley Anne Williams is the author of the widely acclaimed novel, *Dessa Rose*, a compelling exploration of the tense relationship between a rebelling slave woman and the white woman who gives her sanctuary and tries to be her mistress. Her first book of poetry, *The Peacock Poems*, was nominated for a National book Award.

An Emmy Award winner for a television performance of poems from *Someone Sweet Angel Chile*, her second book of poetry, Williams is also the author of *Give Birth to Brightness* (1972), a study of the hero in modern Afro-American literature, and the full-length, one woman drama, *Letters from a New England Negro*, a featured play at the National Black Theater Festival (1991) and the Chicago International Theater Festival (1992). *Working Cotton*, her first work for children, is a Caldecott Medal and Coretta Scott King Awards Honors Book, and was listed in *Parent's Magazine* "Best Books of 1992," and the American Library Association's "Notable Books" of 1992.

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