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The City University of New York



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THE NATIONAL BLACK WRITERS CONFERENCE RETURNS TO MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE, CUNY.

“GATHERING AT THE WATERS: HEALING, LEGACY AND ACTIVISM IN
BLACK LITERATURE” IS THIS YEAR’S THEME: MARCH 22 – 25, 2018

BROOKLYN, NY - - The **Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York (CBL)** announced that the **14th National Black Writers Conference (NBWC)** will be held **Thursday, March 22, 2018 – Sunday, March 25, 2018**, in Central Brooklyn. This year the honorees are **Colson Whitehead, Kwame Dawes, David Levering Lewis, Susan L. Taylor, Steven Barnes and Tananarive Due, and Eugene B. Redmond.**

Local, regional, and nationally celebrated writers, scholars, literary professionals, students, and the community-at-large will convene over four days to discuss topics related to the conference theme, to examine the state of literature produced by Black writers, to listen to writers read from their work, to attend a variety of informative workshops and to fellowship with other supporters of Black literature. The 2018 theme is “Gathering at the Waters: Healing, Legacy and Activism in Black Literature.” One of the highlights of the biannual conference is its distinguished reception honoring some of the field’s outstanding figures. Dr. Myrlie Evers-Williams will serve as this year’s Honorary Chair. For general information, writers’ bios, detailed program information, and registration information, please call (718) 804-8883 or visit www.centerforblackliterature.org. NOTE: The program is subject to change.

THE VISION AND THEME FOR NBWC 2018

The vision for the 14th National Black Writers acknowledges CBL’s concern about the recent and ongoing issues of social inequality and injustices that challenge us and builds on the legacy of healing through activism.

This timely theme centers on the ways in which Black writers use their writing to explore and convey messages that heal and restore our individual selves and collective community. The Conference will also examine the instrumental role Black writers have played in building our cultural history; the imprint that this

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has left in Black literature; and how the literature of Black writers has impacted present-day and future generations.

We will also look at how a writer's beliefs and personal vigorous actions are used to support the political and social change they want to see take place in today's society and in the world. A major strand of the Conference will be a series of panels focused on *Community Conversations on Race, Resistance, and Activism*.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ON RACE, RESISTANCE AND ACTIVISM

The intent of the "Community Conversations" is to create public spaces that will expand conversations on race, resistance and activism; thus the host institutions represent diverse institutions in Brooklyn, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. These institutions (to be announced) represent places that have historically attracted an intergenerational audience and different racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, the venues selected have supported CBL's literary and educational programs, and/or the Humanities Scholars associated with the venues have participated in CBL's conferences, symposia and readings. These relationships form a basis for selecting these venues and scholars. Our nation needs to create safe spaces for these conversations, a community space where people will feel free to discuss and raise questions on sensitive subjects. More details will be announced soon.

NBWC 2018 AT-A-GLANCE

Each day will feature a variety of film screenings, panel discussions, author readings and workshops. Below is an outline of confirmed program elements and confirmed participants. More details (including time, location, updated participants and participant bios) will be housed online at www.centerforblackliterature.org. Please check the website regularly for updates and new information. It will be updated frequently.

Day 1 | Thursday, March 22

- **Community Day.** This day of events is free and open to the public. The Community Day will feature Call for Papers Presentations; Youth Day Literacy program coordinated by Cheryl and Wade Hudson of Just Us Books; Elders Writing Workshop; and Poetry Café (this event will be off-site at Brooklyn Public Library). RSVP for selected events.
- **Film Screening: *Lorraine Hansberry: Sighted Eyes/Feeling Heart*** presented by African Voices/Reel Sisters

Day 2 | Friday, March 23

- **Writing Talkshops:** Fiction with Victor LaValle; Poetry.
- **Film Screening: *BaddDDD Sonia Sanchez*** with talkback featuring Sabrina Schmidt Gordon and Janet Goldwater. Moderator: Dr. Brenda M. Greene

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- **Roundtable Conversation, “Literary Activism in the Post-Obama Era”** with Brittney Cooper, Bakari Kitwana and others. Moderator: Wallace Ford | Panelists will explore the following questions: How does hip-hop culture and the Black Lives Matter movement provide a means to explore activism and resistance in the literature of Black writers in the post-Obama era? How have representations of race, ethnicity, resistance and activism in the Black literary tradition evolved during the post-Obama era?
- **Panel Discussion, “The Black Arts Movement: A Foundation for a Literature of Resistance and Activism”** with Sonia Sanchez, Michael Simanga and Tony Medina. Moderator: TBA | The Black Arts Movement represents an electrifying period in American letters. The scholars on this panel include the co-editor of *SOS—Calling All Black People* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2014) and have written works of fiction, poetry and drama in addition to critical writings on issues of politics, aesthetics and gender. Questions to explore are: How has the literature of the Black Arts Movement provided a foundation for the discussion of race, resistance and activism in the literature of contemporary Black writers? How have representations of race, ethnicity, resistance and activism in the Black Arts Movement evolved and shifted since 1960?
- **Opening Reception** featuring an author reading with Sonia Sanchez at Akwaaba Mansion
- **Open Mic** Coordinated by MEC Office of Student Life

Day 3 | Saturday, March 24

- **Writing Talkshops:** Fiction with Donna Hill; Book Proposals
- **One-on-One Meetings with Agents, Editors, etc.**
- **Film Screenings Presented by African Voices/Reel Sisters |** African Voices/Reel Sisters will co-present a selection of short films; the time includes the directors’ Q & A.
- **Panel Discussion, “Gathering at the Waters: A Call for Healing”** with Desiree Cooper and Margo Jefferson. Moderator: Josef Sorett, author of *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics*. | Literature and poetry have often served as a balm when we are faced with personal and societal challenges. Through their creative storytelling and prose, writers have expressed ways of overcoming obstacles, explored ideas for harnessing emotional strength, and have meditated on the elements that pertain to the well-being of families and communities, individually and collectively. During this discussion, panelists will examine the ways in which literary narratives convey messages of healing, nurturing, and reflection with regard to understanding cultural and sociopolitical themes represented in literature during turbulent times.
- **John Oliver Killens Reading Series** Presents readings with Gregory Pardlo, *Air Traffic: A Memoir of Ambition and Manhood in America* (Knopf, April 2018); and other featured authors.

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- **A Conversation with Bernice L. McFadden** | Prize-winning author Bernice L. McFadden will be in conversation with writer Donna Hill. McFadden's latest novel, *The Book of Harlan*, received the 2017 American Book Award and the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work (Fiction); it was also named a Washington Post Notable Book of 2016.
- **2018 NBWC Tribute and Awards Program**
 - **Steven Barnes will be presented with the Octavia E. Butler Award.** As an influential and pivotal writer in the genre of speculative fiction and the award-winning author of more than two dozen titles, including *Zulu Heart*, comic books, animation and television scripts, and as a major voice in the genre of imaginative literature for readers and writers from the African Diaspora, this special award is in recognition of Barnes' dedication and commitment to creating a significant body of work in speculative literature.
 - **Tananarive Due will be presented with the Octavia E. Butler Award.** As an influential and pivotal writer in the genre of speculative fiction and the award-winning author of more than two dozen titles, including *My Soul to Take* and *The Living Blood*, and as an instructor and writer who is a major voice in expanding the importance of imaginative literature to readers and writers from the African Diaspora, this special award is in recognition of Due's dedication to creating an exceptional body of work.
 - **Kwame Dawes will be presented with the Gwendolyn Brooks Award.** His work as a poet, novelist, editor and scholar is outstanding and represents the heart and soul of people throughout the African Diaspora. Our presentation of this award following the centennial celebration of Gwendolyn Brooks is in the tradition of honoring writers who are committed to preserving the language and culture of Black people across the globe.
 - **Dr. David Levering Lewis will be presented with the W. E. B. Du Bois Award.** This special award is in recognition of his outstanding historical and biographical work in American letters. It is presented in recognition of a lifetime of an exceptional body of work and has been given to Charles Johnson, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kamau Brathwaite and Randall Robinson. Lewis' scholarship and award-winning books on W. E. B. Du Bois, historical works on civil rights and cultural politics, and his voice as an historical expert have made an indelible mark on the American canon.
 - **Eugene B. Redmond will be awarded the inaugural Margaret T. Burroughs Cultural Historian Award** for his commitment to celebrate and chronicle the achievements of writers and artists in Black literature and the literary arts;

for being a passionate archivist and resourceful educator and writer who documents the academic, artistic and literary milestones that highlight the significant contributions made to Black culture and history.

- **Susan L. Taylor will be honored with the Ida B. Wells Institution Building Award** for the important work she carries out as Founder & CEO of the National CARES Mentoring Movement, the only organization dedicated to providing mentoring, healing and wellness services on a national scale for Black children. Taylor is a best-selling author of inspirational books, including *All About Love* and *In the Spirit*, and Editor-in-Chief Emeritus of *ESSENCE* Magazine.
- **Colson Whitehead will be honored with the Toni Morrison Award.** His novels include *The Underground Railroad*, for which he won the 2016 National Book Award for Fiction and the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, *John Henry Days* and *The Intuitionist*. His essays and voice have made an indelible mark on the American literary canon. This special award is in recognition of a body of exceptional literary work.
- **2018 NBWC Benefit Reception** at Skylight Café

Day 4 | Sunday, March 25

- **Writing Talkshops:** Creative Nonfiction/Memoir; Book Proposals with Regina Brooks; Poetry with Keisha-Gaye Anderson; Fiction with Nicole Dennis-Benn; One-on-One Meetings with Agents and Editors
- **Panel Discussion, “The Influence of Race and Politics on Literary Narratives”** with Marita Golden, Jacqueline Jones LaMon, Mychal Denzel Smith. Moderator: Meena Alexander | The interrelationship between race, power, and politics is more intricate than it has ever been. The panelists will explore the following questions: Is the country more racially divided or less racially divided than it was 15 or 20 years ago? What has been the impact of race, power, and politics in our national discourse and on political and social movements? How are the intersections of race and politics represented in the texts of Black literary texts? What is the future of race relations? What role can the public play in shaping race relations?
- **Panel Discussion, “The State of Publishing for Black Writers”** with Rakia A. Clark, Chris Jackson, Jamia Wilson. Moderator: Linda A. Duggins | The publishing world is in the midst of a major transition. Writers, like musicians, are faced with seeking alternative and creative ways of publishing and promoting their books. Black literary agents, publishers, writers, and editors discuss the challenges of publishing in a technology-driven age. These topics include online publishing, blogging, distribution, marketing and e-books. Questions explored are: How do publishers impact the kind of literary texts that are produced by Black writers? How do the Internet, digital publishing and e-books impact the publishing of literature produced by Black writers?

NBWC 2018 PROGRAM SPONSORS AND PARTNERS

- AALBC.com (African American Literature Book Club)
- African Voices/Reel Sisters
- Akashic Books
- AKILA WORKSONGS Inc.
- Amazon Literary Partnership
- Brooklyn Academy of Music
- Brooklyn Literary Council
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- ConEdison
- CUNY Office of Collaborative Programs
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THE MISSION OF THE CENTER FOR BLACK LITERATURE

The mission of the Center for Black Literature is to expand, broaden and enrich the public's knowledge and aesthetic appreciation of the value of Black literature. Through a series of programs that build an audience for the reading, discussion and critical analysis of contemporary Black literature and that serve as a forum for the research and study of Black literature, the Center convenes and supports various literary programs and events such as author readings and book signings, writing workshops, panel discussions, conferences and symposia. It is the only center devoted to this in the country.

For more information, call the Center at 718-804-8883 or visit our website at www.centerforblackliterature.org.

The social media platforms include:

- Facebook: [@CenterForBlackLiterature](https://www.facebook.com/CenterForBlackLiterature)
- Facebook: [@NationalBlackWritersConference](https://www.facebook.com/NationalBlackWritersConference)
- Twitter: [@Center4BlackLit](https://twitter.com/Center4BlackLit)
- Instagram: [@Center4BlackLit](https://www.instagram.com/Center4BlackLit)

Media inquiries, including requests to interview writers, participants, and the leadership of CBL, are directed to AKILA WORKSONGS. Contact April R. Silver at 718-756-8501 (office) or via email at pr@akilaworksongs.com.

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