



# Project on the History of Black *Writing*

**To Date, the project has the most comprehensive database of largely-out-of-print and neglected novels published by African Americans**

and has developed a range of activities for teaching and researching African-American literature at the high school and college level and beyond. HBW is based in the Department of English at the University of Kansas. As HBW expands into other literary genres, it continues to create and disseminate through print and new technologies.

**Biennial Report  
2002 – 2003  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, Kansas**

## Table of Contents

Foreword	page 3
National Advisory Board	page 3
Project Staff	page 4
HBW: A Brief History	page 4
The Collection	page 7
Scope and Content	page 7
Organization	page 8
Campus Outreach Activities	page 10
The Oral History Workshops: Learning to Hear the Stories	page 10
Other Special Projects	page 11
The Example of Langston Hughes: New Essays	page 11
The Red and the Black: Intersections of Race: Native America / African America	page 13
The 150 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the African American Novel	page 14
Language Matters: Reading and Teaching Toni Morrison	page 15
Appendices	page 17
Appendix I: University of Missouri Book Project List	page 17
Appendix II: Working Bibliography for Native-Black Studies	page 19
Appendix III: Langston Hughes National Poetry Project Annual Report 2002 - 2003	

## Foreword (Spring 2003)

The present document is a mid-term progress report from the Project on the History of Black Writing (HBW). Currently, reports are presented every two years (In the late spring of each even-numbered year). This midterm, like the biennial reports, serves to present the ongoing activities of the project for funding agencies, university officials, advisory board members, faculty, graduate students, and staff at the University of Kansas, and other interested parties.

The year of 2001-2002 was consumed with planning for the Langston Hughes Centennial, with which HBW was directly involved. This report, therefore, covers a "midterm" period, primarily 2002-2003. The final report on the Langston Hughes Centennial activities is separate and is available upon request. A byproduct of the Langston Hughes Centennial is the Langston Hughes National Poetry Project (LHNPP), now part of HBW. A report of its activities is included in the Appendix. In August 2003, LHNPP was notified that it will receive \$225,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities to implement "Speaking of Rivers: Taking Poetry to the People."

## National Advisory Board 2000 – 2003

Kathleen E. Bethel	Northwestern University, Illinois
Susanne Dietzel	Loyola University, New Orleans
Myriam Diacaretz	University of Maastricht, The Netherlands
Robert A. (Tony) Harris	St. Ignatious College Prep., Chicago
Trudier Harris-Lopez	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Joyce Hope Scott	Centre Cultural Americain Cotonou, Benin
John Edgar Tidwell	University of Kansas, Lawrence
Jerry W. Ward, Jr.	Dillard University, New Orleans
Richard Yarborough	University of California, Los Angeles
Jean Fagan Yellin, Honorary Member	Pace University, New York (Emeritus)

## Project Staff 2002 - 2003

Maryemma Graham	Director / Founder
*Cornelius E. Minor, II	Technology specialist
*Luckson Mwape	Researcher/bibliographer
*Sara Pike (2001 – 2002)	Project Manager
*Cheryl Ragar	Editorial specialist
Alison Watkins	Langston Hughes Project
Jaime Whitt	Special Projects

\*HBW funded staff

## Project on the History of Black Writing: a Brief History

The Project on the History of Black Writing (HBW), originally known as the Afro-American Novel Project, began in 1983 at the University of Mississippi, Oxford. Organized to compile a comprehensive bibliographic history of largely neglected and out of print novels published by African-American writers, the initial objective was to create a study guide for both teachers and students to facilitate the use of African-American texts in the classroom for traditional, comparative, and interdisciplinary study. *The Afro-American Novel: A Guide for Teachers and Students*, appeared in 1986 and was later revised and expanded with a two-year grant from the Ford Foundation. The guide included a bibliography of novels published between 1853 and 1980, compiled by the project. The significant number of titles listed between the Reconstruction and Urban Migration periods (1865-1910) did much to challenge assumptions that African-Americans throughout the nineteenth century left only oral records as a result of widespread illiteracy.



In 1989, the project relocated to Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts. Funded by a three-year grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, HBW became affiliated with the W. E. B. DuBois Institute at Harvard University. The Project continued to expand their holdings to create *A Checklist of the Afro-American Novel, 1853-1990* (1990).

In 1996 the HBW received a two-year grant from the Lemelson Foundation of Hampshire College. Gaining an affiliation with the Smithsonian's Museum of American History and the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, HBW spent two years developing a prototype for a CD-ROM. This CD-ROM, "Neither Bond Nor Free: An Anthology of Rare African-American Texts," digitized one complete novel, with information about the author and the period. It was our intention to continue digitizing the novels in the collection to make them available as a full CD-ROM set. With the technology still developing, funds were not sufficient at that time to move the entire database to the digital platform. "Neither Bond Nor Free," however, pointed the way for the success of later projects.

In 1998 the project moved to the University of Kansas, and with funds provided by Microsoft and the Kansas Endowment Association, completed the first full phase of its digital project. The full texts of seventy-five African-American novels written and published between 1853 and 1919 are now available through Encarta Africana: Library of Black America. Funds remain crucial to the survival of the HBW. Currently efforts are underway to secure support from corporate and federal agencies to update the project's

**With the publication of this volume, the Project established itself as not only a leading collection in this area of study, but as a leading *producer*.**

equipment and to hire a technical staff to maintain the website, complete a line of digital projects, and expand the Project's outreach programs.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought new dimensions to the project. In addition to efforts on the digital front, the project has surged ahead riding the pulse of trends created in the community of black literature. In many cases the project has created those trends itself.

In 2002 the project negotiated with Cambridge University Press to publish the *Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*, scheduled for release in late 2003. The volume contains essays from prominent scholars in the field of African-American literature from Europe and the United States. Representative texts are discussed and coverage is not limited to the canonical. With the publication of this volume, the project established itself as not only a leading collection in this area of study, but as a leading producer. Additional publishing projects are expected to result from the partnership between HBW and Cambridge University Press.

The Contemporary Poetry Project is the recent and collective brainchild of the HBW Advisory Board. Since its inception, the bulk of the project work had been done with the novel. Along the way, the project has emphasized the importance of outreach and dissemination, while retaining its principal emphasis upon the recovery and documentation of an African-American narrative tradition. The completion of the *Cambridge Companion* is significant not only in terms of new and current scholarship but also marks an important moment in the project's twenty-year history. It has allowed the project to assess its past and prepare for the future, as it positions itself to respond to new challenges emerging within the field of black writing. Poetry has become a major genre, bringing both lines of the oral tradition together, performance and narrative. The project will continue to assess other areas of black literary development and is fully prepared to meet the challenges presented by the global study of African-American literature.

## The Collection



### Scope and Content

The principal component of the HBW is its manuscript collection. There are photographic copies of 480 texts dating from 1861 to the present, a growing archive of over 60 rare books, and more than one hundred rare and out-of-print journals. In addition, the project has collected bibliographic information for more than 1,500 items of literature written by African Americans to serve as the foundation for collection development. Bibliographic information acquired by the project has been published and distributed a number of times, thus serving in conjunction with the texts as a means of providing a strong research base for the study of lesser-known African American literature throughout the last two centuries.

Although the majority of the texts “in-hand” date from 1950-1970, a time span encompassing the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, significant acquisitions exist from other periods in African American history. Copies of the texts in the Project’s collection of major importance include Albert Coleman’s *Rosy, the Octoroon* (1929), Lucretia Coleman’s *Poor Ben: A Story of Real Life* (1890), T.G. Steward’s *A Charleston Life Story* (1899), G. Langhorne Pryor’s *Neither Bond Nor Free* (1892), and (Kansas-born) filmmaker Oscar Micheaux’s novel *The Conquest* (1913).

## Organization

Despite the fact that no definitive literary timetable can be comfortably applied to history, a general scheme for African-American Literature follows. This periodization of African-American literature for collection development was adopted by the advisory board at its 2001 meeting.



- △ 1400 – 1865
- △ 1866 – 1912
- △ 1913 – 1940
- △ 1941 – 1968
- △ 1969 – Present

This scheme provides the intellectual framework by which the manuscripts were organized, and serves as a means of interpreting the general trends of African-American literature. Each series is accompanied by a description and a sub-series description when necessary.

The following series have been included to indicate the expanding interest of HBW. Because the project began with a primary interest in fiction, these series are skeletal in nature. Over the last four years there has been a concerted effort to expand these holdings, which over time, may provide further opportunities for inquiry and research.

- △ Series VI – Short Story 1865 – 2000
  - This series is divided into five subseries:
    - Pre - 1865 (including 1865)
    - 1866 - 1885
    - 1886 - 1910
    - 1911 - 1970
    - 1971 - 2000
- △ Series VII – Biography/Autobiography/Memoir
  - This series is divided into five subseries:



- Pre - 1865 (including 1865)
- 1866 - 1885
- 1886 - 1910
- 1911 - 1970
- 1971 – 2000

Δ Series VIII – Critical Essay

- This series is divided into five subseries:
  - Pre - 1865 (including 1865)
  - 1866 - 1885
  - 1886 - 1910
  - 1911 - 1970
  - 1971 – 2000

Δ Series IX – Poetry

- This series is divided into five subseries:
  - Pre - 1865 (including 1865)
  - 1866 - 1885
  - 1886 - 1910
  - 1911 - 1970
  - 1971 – Present

## Campus Outreach Activities



### **The Oral History Workshops: Learning to Hear the Stories**

In spring 2000, the project introduced the Oral History Workshop, after securing a small grant from the Hall Center for the Humanities.

The program was so successful that the workshop has been repeated each year since. In 2003 the workshop officially became part of the Hall Center's programming and is now hosted and organized by

them. HBW staff remain actively involved, and we are considered the "founders" of the Oral History Workshop at the University of Kansas. Further plans are being made to expand the workshop to a summer institute. The community has taken the lessons from the workshop to heart and in 2002, a group of women founded the Black Women's Oral History Group, whose mission is to record the history of the African-American

experience in Lawrence. The idea has spread to other communities, and regular meetings are held of the original women's group and the expanded group, representing both the Native American and Mexican American communities. Oral history at KU and Lawrence is here to stay. AS HBW continues to expand its database of oral history sources, this workshop showcases the "best practices" in this growing

field by bringing together historians, genealogists, sociologists, museum educators, school administrators, teachers, and individual family members. As the importance of oral history becomes more recognized, the oral history workshop is seen as the ONLY place at KU where the local researcher and the academic scholar can have a common learning experience. Neither is oral history exclusively linked to the African-American tradition. This workshop demonstrates the extraordinary intersections of various traditions and values, aesthetics and voices. Over the course of four years, the workshop has featured Native American and Indigenous peoples, German and Scandinavian immigrants, Central American, Middle Eastern, Mexican American, Jewish, African, and African American people, as well as stories from 9-11.

**As the importance of oral history becomes more recognized, the oral history conference is significant not only because of its mission and impact, but because of the unique population it serves.**

## Other Special Projects

### **The Example of Langston Hughes: New Essays**

Work on this project began in late-June 2002. The goal is to assemble and publish a manuscript of critical new essays on the work of Kansas writer Langston Hughes. The project is the outgrowth of the internationally-recognized Langston Hughes Centennial Symposium hosted by the University of Kansas. As a result of the overwhelmingly positive response to the symposium by both presenters and participants, Beverly Jarrett, editor-in-chief of the University of Missouri Press, approached Maryemma Graham about producing the first new volume of critical essays on Langston Hughes in more than 20 years. Cheryl Ragar was hired in the summer of 2002 as the project coordinator in order to move forward on this opportunity.



Initial efforts included assembling a database of Hughes scholars to solicit for new essays. Drawing from lists of participants involved in conferences held in celebration of Hughes' centennial at Yale University, in Joplin, at Southwestern Missouri State University, and at the University of Kansas, the database was created. Invitations were then extended to scholars both nationally and internationally who had presented their work at the conferences. Approximately 80 invitations were sent in this first mailing.

Over the course of the summer and early fall response to the call was positive. Many wrote to express interest in participating in the project, to request more information, and to offer suggestions of others who might be included. Subsequent efforts were then made to contact scholars who had not participated in conferences, but who were engaged in new work. In addition, papers were solicited from presenters at the Modern Language Association Conference in late-December 2002. Manuscripts began arriving in the office in early fall 2002, and a final deadline of May 2003 has been established.

More than 20 essays have been received from scholars around the world. Five more essays have been promised by final deadline. Participants in this project include both established names in the field and new scholars. Arnold Rampersad, the author of the definitive two-volume collection, *The Life of Langston Hughes*, has agreed to write the preface for this book. Essay submissions range in topic from theoretical explorations of modernism in Hughes' work from the established scholar Lindon Barrett, to a fresh look at children's literature from Giselle Anatol. Well-known scholars such as Thomas Cripps, Amritjit Singh, Lorenzo Thomas, and Cary Wintz have submitted essays, as have international scholars like Olga Barrios, Geneviève Fabre, and Onwuchekwa Jemie. The collection will offer a fresh look at the life and work of Langston Hughes utilizing contemporary approaches and archival sources previously untapped. This work has been accomplished through the use of one part-time student-hourly position. Graduate student Cheryl Ragar, who brings her experience in editing *American Studies* at K.U. for four years, logged 20-hours per week in the summer and just 10 hours per week during the school year in the service of this project.

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While much good effort has been achieved, the hard work of preparing the manuscripts for publication remains. The University of Missouri Press continues to offer their encouragement of this volume. It will be the responsibility of the project, however, to ensure the very best final product.

Copyediting and revision suggestions of manuscripts has begun. This process is time consuming and vital. Both Cheryl Ragar and Maryemma Graham are reading and commenting on all the manuscripts. Regular communication between the two is necessary in order to provide thorough clear feedback for authors. In addition, organizing of the manuscripts into a useful overall framework is ongoing. Maryemma Graham will write an introduction to the book, and Cheryl Ragar will produce a bibliography of the critical reception of Langston Hughes' writings starting in the 1920s.

*For More information, see Appendix I.*

## The Red and the Black: Intersections of Race: Native America / African America



Work in oral history and other areas have been good for the project as such work has allowed for greater exploration of Black history and writing. The project has spent its life span tracing the development of the black novel and examining what parallels can be drawn between those creative works depicting the experiences within the diaspora. We are currently investigating linkages between Native Americans and African-Americans, specifically where those linkages have been made present in writing, and we are looking to draw similar parallels – especially in our quest to recover more texts.

This work involves several pieces. Before the work can begin in earnest, the project is working to position itself to attract significant external funding. A large part of that “positioning” work includes identifying and networking in this new community of scholars and funding agencies. Also, we are doing the background research and compiling a bibliography of all the works and articles that highlight the historical and literary linkages between Native Americans and African Americans in the “new world.”

*For a sample of the bibliography, see Appendix II.*

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### **The 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the African-American Novel**

Of all the special projects on the table right now, the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the first African-American novel is the newest. William Wells Brown published Clotel or The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States in 1853. In celebration of that event, we will partner



with the European-based African-American Research Library (sponsored by the Collegium for African-American Research/CAAR). The project is also planning to partner with a service provider for an online or virtual celebration in the form of a virtual museum that would allow celebrants, visitors, and scholars to glimpse into the past 150 years of Black literary production in the United States. More specifics are still being developed.

## **Language Matters: Reading and Teaching Toni Morrison**

**Project Director:** Maryemma Graham

**Sponsoring Partners:** The Toni Morrison Society  
Cardozo Senior High School  
The University of Kansas



“Language Matters: Reading and Teaching Toni Morrison” is a project geared toward encouraging high school teachers to bring the novels of the Nobel Prize-winning author into their classrooms and to address the many perceived obstacles that so frequently accompany the teaching of her work. The focus of the project has been on open discussion of Morrison’s works, issues within them, as well as the challenges of broaching such issues inside the secondary school classroom.

Supported by funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), 12 teachers meet once a month with one teacher/facilitator and one Toni Morrison scholar for an evening to discuss one of the author's seven novels and any supplemental critical material or resources selected by the attending Morrison scholar. The teachers represent Osbourn Park High School, Manassas, VA; Forest Park High School and Baltimore City College High School, Baltimore, MD; Gaithersburg High School, Gaithersburg, MD; as well as Woodrow Wilson High School and Francis L. Cardozo Senior High School, Washington, D.C. The Morrison scholars are published professors affiliated with such colleges as the University of North Carolina, George Mason University, the University of Virginia, and University of Pennsylvania. Thus, while located in a very centralized, rather small geographic area, the pool of experience between participating teachers and scholars has proven great.

The novels discussed to date include The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Beloved, Tar Baby, and Jazz in addition to a collection of Morrison interviews, entitled Conversations with Toni Morrison. Each meeting begins with a brief presentation by the visiting Morrison scholar discussing the work – a discussion that may include language, violence, history, sexuality, etc. After this short presentation, discussion is opened up between the teachers and scholar and between the teachers themselves. These

teachers are able to draw upon the scholarly knowledge and experience of the visiting professors, but also draw from their own observations while reading the texts and experiences teaching the texts in their own classrooms. The teachers discuss at length how to approach and circumnavigate the challenges—both perceived and actual—of teaching the works of Toni Morrison not only to Advanced Placement high school students, but for all levels of high school readers.

Each participating teacher has agreed, in the upcoming term, to adopt a project at his or her school, based upon what has been coined the “Cardozo Project.” That is, the teacher’s will propose the study of one Morrison text, most likely The Bluest Eye, across an entire grade (or more) of high school readers. All students, from remedial reading classes to Advanced English will read and discuss, and engage the same text at the same time. Teachers, as well as students, will shares ideas, insight, and experiences of the project. Students will be responsible for

creating their own presentations/projects based on the novel, and at the culmination of the reading cycle the whole group will come together to share their respective work at a school wide assembly.

In June of this year, when the teachers have completed the monthly meetings, they will come together for an intensive week-long

seminar where they will pull together the “hands-on” materials needed for this expanded project. They will discuss ideas for student projects and assemble necessary resources to facilitate the teaching of Toni Morrison’s work to all young readers.

In addition to plans for the “Cardozo Project,” several of the teachers are being currently trained to become facilitators/teachers in an expansion of the “Language Matters: Reading and Teaching Toni Morrison” to be conducted on a national level. Thus, after the completion of their respective “Cardozo Projects,” these teachers will work to continue and build upon the movement to encourage the teaching of Toni Morrison’s work and to promote reading more generally throughout the country.

**...the focus of the project has been on open discussion of Morrison’s works, issues within, as well as the challenges of broaching such issues inside the secondary school classroom.**



## Appendices

### Appendix I: University of Missouri Book Project List

Giselle Liza Anatol,  
"Langston Hughes and the Children's Literary Tradition"

Lindon Barrett,  
"Langston Hughes's *The Ways of White Folk*: Modernism and Bodies that Don't Matter"

Olga Barrios,  
"Langston Hughes's Experimental and Revolutionary Theatre: 'Water drawn from the well of the people' and 'given back to them in a cup of beauty'"

Juda Bennett,  
"Langston Hughes on the Open Road: Compulsory Heterosexuality and the Question of Presence"

Thomas Cripps,  
"Langston Hughes and the Movies: The Case of *Way Down South* "

Christopher De Santis,  
"The Essayistic Vision of Langston Hughes"

Cheikh Ahmadou Dieng,  
"Poeme Pour Langston"

Brian Dolinar,

Geneviève Fabre,  
"Langston Hughes 'Meets' and Leaves Harlem: 1921-1931"

Sandra Govan,  
"Langston Hughes and The Paradox of Modernism in *The Ways of White Folks*"

Trudier Harris-Lopez,  
"Almost—But Not Quite—Blues Men in Langston Hughes's Poetry"

Onwuchekwa Jemie,  
"The Modernist Masters of 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Poetry: A Re-Evaluation"

William Kumbier,  
"The First, Real 'New York' Musical: Diversity and Difference in *Street Scene*

R. Baxter Miller,  
"The Beauty and the Meaning: The Structure of Space and Time in Stories by Langston Hughes"

Arnold Rampersad,  
Preface

Jeffrey A. Schwarz,  
"Langston Hughes's 'Luani of the Jungles': Re-Imagining the Africa of *Heart of Darkness*"

Elizabeth Schultz,

Amritjit Singh,  
Forthcoming

Isabel Soto,

Joan Stone,

Lorenzo Thomas,  
"It is the Same Everywhere for Me': Langston Hughes and the African Diaspora's Everyman"

Michael Thurston,  
"Montage of a Dream Destroyed: Langston Hughes in Spain"

John Edgar Tidwell,  
"Private Life, Private Lies: Frank Marshall Davis, Langston Hughes, and the Problem of Self-Representation"

Steven Tracy,  
"Langston Hughes and Aunt Hager's Children's Blues"

Regennia Williams,  
"Mother to Son: The Letters from Carrie Hughes Clark to Langston Hughes, 1928-1938"

Cary D. Wintz,  
"The Novels of Langston Hughes: The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond"

Robert Young,  
"Hughes' Red Poetics and the practice of 'dis-alienation'"

*Previously Published:*

Kate Anderson Baldwin,  
"The Russian Connection: Interracialism as Queer Alliance in Langston Hughes's *The Ways of White Folks*"

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## LANGSTON HUGHES NATIONAL POETRY PROJECT

Annual Report  
2002-2003

University of Kansas  
Lawrence, Kansas



## **Langston Hughes National Poetry Project Annual Report, 2003**

The Langston Hughes NPPP originated from two sources. One is the success of the Langston Hughes Centennial Symposium "Let America be America Again," which Chancellor Hemenway called the "most important event in the university's history," and of other centennial activities. This symposium reassessed Hughes' literary and cultural importance and provided opportunities for reading, listening to, and talking about poetry and its role in American culture.

The other is the University's longstanding desire to create an outreach component identified with Langston Hughes within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. For some years, a "Langston Hughes Resource Center" was discussed but not brought to fruition. Guided by discussions in the Hughes centennial year with our partners Shook, Hardy, Bacon, National Council of Teachers of English, the Academy of American Poets, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and Hughes's publishers Alfred A. Knopf, and Hill & Wang, the LHNPP became the way in which the work begun with the centennial symposium could continue.

The LHNPP has given a significant amount of time since the symposium to collaboration on other Hughes centennial activities, developing and enhancing national, state, and local related literary and cultural activities and serving as an incubator for other projects that originated in the centennial symposium.

### **NEH Planning Grant report**

The LHNPP's planning grant "Speaking of Rivers: Taking Poetry to the People," ended in February 2002. We submitted a final report on our activities in May to the National Endowment for the Humanities (see report attached).

Our report included information about soliciting 25 sites for Poetry Circles, groups of 20-30 people, led by a Hughes scholar or specialist, who come together to read and discuss Hughes's poetry and other work. Sites range from libraries, writers clubs, community centers, and a county jail to a Kansas City law firm and the National Council of Teachers of English. We also identified twenty-one poets and scholars—including Joy Harjo, Kevin Powell, Ross Talarico, Elmaz Abinader, and Emily Bernard—who agreed to be in our Speakers Bureau.

We developed the "Langston Hughes Reader's Guide" for the Poetry Circles. The guide includes a chronology of Hughes's life; an extensive narrative overview, with particular emphasis on his life in Kansas and the Midwest; a summary of the sessions; and a selected bibliography. The "Langston Hughes Reader's Guide" was distributed to all participants in the Poetry Circles, was modified for use in the schools, and became a major component of the recruitment package for the Poetry Circles.

Because of the tremendous local interest in the Hughes centennial activities, Lawrence was chosen as the site of a model Poetry Circle designed to attract widespread interest in teaching and reading Hughes. "Reading and Remembering Langston Hughes," a four-part book discussion series, focused on Hughes' poetry, prose, and autobiography. Six Kansas communities

participated in this series, which began in fall 2001 and concluded in spring 2002. The Kansas Humanities Council provided funds to support this project. The Lawrence Public Library hosted the first Poetry Circle, which had to be divided into two groups of 32 people because of the large number of people interested in participating. These book discussions were audiotaped for repurposing on the NPP website as part of an online Poetry Circle and are now available in both streaming audio and print formats. These discussions also serve as the basis for a cross-listed one-hour credit course "Reading and Remembering Langston Hughes" offered through the University of Kansas Independent Study program.

The development of the project website, *Digital Hughes* ([www.kuce.org/hughes](http://www.kuce.org/hughes)), was the second major task to be accomplished during the planning period. During the Hughes centennial symposium, KUCE recorded visiting Hughes scholars and poets who presented at the symposium and the ensuing session discussions. C-Span also videotaped the Danny Glover presentation on the evening of February 7 and the symposium events on Friday, February 8. Virtually all scholars and artists who attended the symposium consented to having their presentations taped. The website houses extensive resources for use in a variety of settings and is a major means to disseminate project materials and facilitate contacts.

The content of the website provides background material on Langston Hughes, links to other sites, an extensive bibliography, and other resources on Hughes, the Harlem Renaissance, African American history and literature, poetry, jazz, and to the various places he lived, including Harlem, Lawrence, and Joplin. It also provides background information on the symposium presenters and their publications on Hughes and related subjects.

### **Grant Product**

A fifteen-minute original video featuring Robert Pinsky, Judith Jones, and Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis reading and discussing their favorite Hughes poems has been shown at several sites, including the NEH.

### **NEH Implementation Grant**

In February 2002 we submitted an implementation grant to the NEH. We learned in July 2002 that we had not received the grant, although all of the reviewers' comments praised the project's concept and goals. Throughout this year we maintained contact with our Poetry Circle sites and Speakers Bureau members, the majority of whom remained part of the project. Several sites have already completed their Poetry Circles, including the National Council of Teachers of English, which supported 105 sites in 31 states. We resubmitted the grant in February 2003 after making adjustments requested by the NEH reviewers (see supplemental materials).

The implementation grant will fund the following activities for "Speaking of Rivers: Taking Poetry to the People":

- Schedule, promote, and advertise twenty-five Poetry Circles at local sites that discuss the life and works of Langston Hughes. Funds will support a site facilitator, local discussion leaders,

the purchase of books by Langston Hughes, and a visiting scholar or poet to give one public presentation.

- Expand, print, and distribute the *Langston Hughes Reader's Guide* for the Poetry Circles and as a general information document on Hughes.
- Produce and distribute a resource kit, *A Poetry Circle for All Seasons*, with instructions for developing the basic model for the Poetry Circle, sample program strategies, a continually updated listing of print and video sources, and the speakers bureau list.
- Expand and maintain Digital Hughes, a comprehensive website containing the online resources, the proceedings from the Hughes Centennial, and links to Hughes and poetry-related events and materials for U.S. and global audiences.
- Prepare a speakers bureau of poets and scholars available for public programs.
- Develop and implement a project evaluation plan.
- Recruit partners and sponsors for additional Poetry Circles from corporate and private sectors.

## **University of Kansas**

### **The Langston Hughes Center for the Study of American Cultures**

Chancellor Robert Hemenway charged the Langston Hughes Center committee with developing a proposal for the Langston Hughes Center for the Study of American Cultures. Alison Watkins has coordinated this committee's activities--setting up meetings, maintaining communication within the committee, and compiling the committee's final report. The proposal is currently under consideration by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences.

## **Community Activities**

### **Langston Hughes February Festival: Celebrating Kansas Writers & Artists (February 19-23, 2003)**

This project was part of a pioneering venture, a collaboration between the University of Kansas English Department's Conference on New Literacies, the Kansas Conference on Writing and Literature and the initial Langston Hughes February Fest. All of these programs had the overlapping goals of celebrating Kansas writers and artists. The intent of this new partnership was to build on the tremendous success of the February 2002 Langston Hughes centennial symposium, which has been recognized as an exemplary event with several regional and national awards. The Kansas Humanities Council funded the public events on February 22-23. A final report to the KHC is currently being prepared.

The festival began on February 21 with two sold-out performances of Kevin Willmott's *CSA: Confederate States of America* at Liberty Hall and a standing-room-only performance of KU students' one-act plays at the Lawrence Arts Center.

During five sessions at the Carnegie Building in downtown Lawrence scholars and writers spoke to small but energized and thoughtful audiences. The session topics were "Kansas' Poetic Landscape," "Bridging the Gap between Literature & Science," "Growing Up in Kansas:

Coming of Age & Enchantment Stories,” “Exploring Literature through Dance,” and “A ‘Novel’ Approach to Kansas. “

Although Gordon Parks was unable to travel to Kansas because of health and weather problems, KU Continuing Education media staff planned and executed an innovative long-distance interview session with Parks in his New York home. Panel members in Kansas interviewed Parks, whose comments were captured on videotape, rushed by overnight express to Lawrence, and edited in time for the Saturday evening presentation. The audience was treated to a moving “virtual” evening with Gordon Parks, a legendary Kansas son and Renaissance man world renown in several fields who is still “at the top of his game” at ninety years of age. Excerpts of St Clair Bourne’s documentary film *Half-Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks* were also shown.

On February 23 three film screenings were held at the Haskell Indian Nations University auditorium. Audience members were able to talk with two filmmakers, Madison Lacy and Pok-Chi Lau, after viewing their work. For all of the events on that weekend our goals were for the audience to learn more about their state’s cultural heritage through a variety of perspectives and to participate in provocative discussions. We accomplished both goals.

### **African American Women’s Oral History Project**

Following the Hughes symposium, this group has launched an effort to collect oral histories from the African American, Hispanic, and Native American citizens of Lawrence. Marla Jackson’s quilt exhibits that tell related stories are an important component of this project.

Group members have developed appropriate questions and a training workshop for potential interviewers, and they have compiled lists of possible interview subjects. They presented a session at the 2003 Oral History Conference sponsored by the Hall Center. Project interviews will be videotaped and transcribed. The videos will be available to the public on Channel 19, the Sunflower Broadband public access channel, and will be placed in the archives of Spencer Research Library. This project was the genesis of the current Ford Foundation proposal on Native American/African American relationships.

### **The Langston Hughes Center for Community Enrichment**

The LHNPP has participated in the Lawrence Public Library Study Group that has presented a plan to the City of Lawrence to transform the Carnegie Library Building into the Langston Hughes Center for Community Enrichment. The study group’s proposal includes: developing programming to encouraging verbal and cultural literacies, coordinating oral history initiatives, highlighting the significance of Langston Hughes in Lawrence, and housing the National Heritage Area office.

### **Poetry: The Language of Life**

During the spring semester of 2002, six Lawrence poets visited Lori Stussie’s creative writing class at Lawrence Alternative High School on Wednesday afternoons. The goal of the project,

funded by the Douglas County Community Foundation, was to expose the students to poetry and allow them to read, write, and discuss poetry with local poets. In their reactions to the poets' visits that are included in the book of the students' poetry that was published at the end of the semester, some of the student poets commented that they liked having different people come to the class because each made unique contributions. As the poetry book comprised of the students' works from the semester demonstrates, the students took the challenge of writing poetry seriously and ran with it, with wonderful results.

### **Read across Lawrence**

Alison Watkins, Maryemma Graham, and Barbara Watkins have served on this committee organized by the Lawrence Public Library. This annual community reading program encourages Lawrence residents to read the same book, attend book discussions, and other related events. In 2002 as part of the community-wide Langston Hughes celebration, Lawrencians read Hughes' *Not without Laughter*. This year's book was Tom Averill's *The Secrets of the Tsil Café*. More than 300 people attended RaL events in 2003.

### **Community Arts Roundtable**

Each month a group of Lawrence arts and humanities organizations, including the LHNPP, meets at the Lawrence Arts Center. This group deals with such issues as marketing, collaboration on projects, and unifying Lawrence's cultural organizations.

### **National Outreach Activities**

The Langston Hughes National Poetry Project has begun to conduct workshops and plan activities beyond Lawrence. In addition, expanded possibilities for partnerships continue. On March 23, 2003, at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Research Center, Maryemma Graham conducted a three-hour workshop for registered participants as part of the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (4C's). The conference theme was taken from a Hughes poem, and the workshop was one of the highlights of the three-day event. Although 34 people had preregistered, nearly 100 filled the media center for the workshop. The LHNPP website developed by KU Continuing Education and the *Langston Hughes Reader's Guide* were the major resources utilized. Each participant received the Reader's Guide (because of the unexpectedly large audience, some had to be mailed afterwards) and the website was "tested" for its usefulness, thoroughness and accessibility. Because of the excellent design of the KUCE website, under the supervision of Dr. Barbara Watkins, participants were able to view the rich discussions that took place over several months in a streaming audio format. Several participants commented that this was the first workshop that presented possibilities not only for teaching at various academic levels, but it also gave many different types of people, including individuals with disabilities (the website is ADA compliant) diverse opportunities to learn about and appreciate the richness of Langston Hughes, who has been too often perceived as a "simple" poet.

A meeting with Deborah Garrison, poetry editor at Alfred A. Knopf, involved a discussion of a possible conference on Twentieth Century Poetry and a documentary film on the evolution of



modern poetry [some of the footage is already housed at KU]. KU is the first choice site for such a conference because of the national perception that the Hughes Centennial Symposium was “the most inclusive of academic conferences” and continues to have an impact. Garrison pointed out that Hughes remains their best-selling author of all time, even outselling Toni Morrison. Such a conference would certainly make use of the extensive archive of Beat poetry at Spencer and examine the Midwest as a “climate for genius.” (Another top-selling Knopf poetry author is another Kansan, Kevin Young of Topeka.) Knopf gave \$7500 to support the Hughes Centennial and is expected to be a large donor for this conference that would attract the most important poets writing in the nation today. The conference would explore the last fifty years of American poetry, beginning with the Beats and culminating with Hip Hop poetry. Garrison has offered the Knopf poets to participate in the Speakers Bureau for the National Poetry Project.

## **Grants**

### **1) Funded**

National Endowment for the Humanities, “Speaking of Rivers: Taking Poetry to the People” planning grant, \$40,500

Douglas County Community Foundation, “Poetry: The Language of Life,” \$2,500

Kansas Humanities Council, “Langston Hughes February Festival: Celebrating Kansas Writers & Artists,” \$5,800

Kansas African American Commission, for videotaping of presentations in three Kansas public schools, \$2,500

### **2) Pending or in Initial Stages**

National Endowment for the Humanities, “Speaking of Rivers: Taking Poetry to the People” implementation grant, \$224, 959 (submitted February 2003)

Rockefeller Foundation, “River City Stories: A Community Arts Project,” \$77,850 (submitted May 2002; being revised for resubmission) This project would provide opportunities for three distinct Lawrence groups—African-American, Native American, and Hispanic—to research, to collect their own stories, and to present them through a variety of expressive forms, both literary and folk based.

Philip Morris, (now Altria), Jennifer Goodale, of Altria Foundation, is considering our proposal to conduct residential poetry camps to identify and train talented young people in the Chicago/Kansas City area. Goodale provided a strong support letter for the NEH grant proposal and is assisting us with identifying additional partners. A likely possibility is Michael Warr, founder of the Chicago-based Warr Zone, a multi-arts organization widely known for its innovative and effective programs for at-risk youth.

AOLTimeWarner, Maryemma Graham has contacted Richard Parsons, CEO, at the suggestion of Gordon Parks. TimeWarner is now the custodian for *Life Magazine* archives. (Parks was the first African American photographer to be hired by a major national magazine.) Provost David Shulenburger has strongly encouraged us to pursue this trail, which may lead to Parks' placing his photo archive at KU. Its value is estimated in the millions of dollars.

Ford Foundation This grant would involve faculty at KU and Haskell and would be managed by the Hall Center. While it is NOT a "Langston Hughes Project" activity, it evolved from discussions between Maryemma Graham and the Ford Foundation. Funding initially was sought for the Hughes Centennial. As the dialogue continued, Ford Foundation program officer Gertrude Fraser became interested in the variety of activities involving pioneering work in interracial relationships being done at KU. After visiting Lawrence in fall 2002, she decided to fund a "new" project here. The grant proposal, which is being written collaboratively under the supervision of Associate Dean Carl Strikwerda, is nearly ready for submission.

Kellogg Foundation The Black Women's Oral history Project has contacted Ford Foundation program officer Barbara Sabol, formerly of Lawrence, about possible funding for the Lawrence multiracial oral history project. This project is modeled in part on another Kellogg initiative, *The African American Health Care Project: The Oral Histories*, which documents historical experiences of African Americans in Southeastern Michigan with regard to Health Care, the Health Professions, and the Health Sciences.

#### Awards

In the past several months the Langston Hughes centennial symposium has been honored with several regional and national awards. Two other national and international awards are pending.

Universities Continuing Education Association (UCEA) Region V, Innovations and Contributions Award

UCEA Liberal Learning Community of Practice Phillip E. Frandson Award for Sustained Excellence in Arts Humanities and Sciences Programs.

UCEA Conferences and Professional Programs Community of Practice Exemplary Program Award

UCEA Outstanding Noncredit Program Award-- special recognition

Association for Continuing Higher Education (ACHE) Region VIII Exceptional Noncredit Program Award

The Hughes symposium also received two regional awards (one gold, one silver) from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE)

## National Advisory Board

- Sheila Biddle** Professor of history at Columbia University and former program officer with the Ford Foundation, also serves as a consulting advisor to this project.
- Mary Beth Blake** Lawyer, Kansas City, Missouri, Shook, Hardy, and Bacon law firm
- Charles Flowers** Executive Director, Academy of American Poets, New York, NY
- Sandra Gibbs** Urbana, Illinois, director of special programs, National Council of Teachers of English
- Nancy Hiebert** Lawrence, Kansas, member, Lawrence/Douglas County National Heritage Area Committee
- Juanita Moore** Executive Director, American Jazz Museum, 18<sup>th</sup> & Vine, Kansas City, Mo.
- Kevin Powell** New York, NY, poet, editor, cultural critic
- Arnold Rampersad** Sara Hart Kimball Professor of English at Stanford University, distinguished author and official Hughes biographer, and executor for the Hughes estate serves as consulting advisor
- Jerry W. Ward Jr.** Poet and professor of English at Dillard University, New Orleans, LA

## Staff

The faculty member most identified with the Langston Hughes National Poetry Project is Maryemma Graham, professor of English.

Alison Watkins is the project's coordinator, primary researcher, and grant developer. Watkins has worked with the project since February 2001. This half-time position was funded from March 2001-March 2003 by the Office of the Chancellor as part of his support for the development of a proposal to create the Langston Hughes Center. Beginning in March 2003, this half-time position has been supported by the funds from the Project on the History of Black Writing. Pending notification of the NEH funding, the chancellor has committed another year of support for this position.

Several KU faculty and staff continue to give their time to work with the LHNPP. Substantial support is provided by KUCE, especially Barbara Watkins, coordinator of curriculum and projects at KUCE since 1984. Watkins oversees the design, development, and maintenance of the project website, *Digital Hughes*. Should the NEH implementation grant be funded, Watkins will serve as co-director, and as the primary administrative contact for the project.