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Survival -Black Arts

DON'T DENY MY VOICE



HISTORY OF Black Writing

2012-2014 Report

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Movement

Making the Wright Connection

Speech-A

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

VISION, MISSION AND GOALS	3
Foreword	4
Project Director's Letter	5
THE PROJECT DIGITAL INITIATIVE AND PROJECT MANAGER'S REPORT 2012-2014	8
SPECIAL PROJECTS	9
Don't Deny My Voice Summer Institute	9
GEMS INITIATIVE	14
BLACK LITERARY SUITES	15
INTER AMERICAN STUDIES	17
ВLACK ВООК РКОЈЕСТ	18
FINANCIAL REPORT	20
GRANT PROPOSALS 2012-2014	21
College Language Association (CLA) Conferences	22
Advisory Board Meetings	23
THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF BLACK WRITING:	
A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF 30 YEARS	24
HBW STAFF	26
NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD	27
CURRENT STAFF MEMBERS	28

Special Thanks to

Dean Danny Anderson Associate Deans Ann Cudd and Ann Schofield Department Chairs Marta Caminero-Santangelo and Anna Neill Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little HBW's Advisory Board HBW's dedicated staff Lori Whitten and Robin Holladay Dean Lorraine Haricombe, KU Libraries Brian Rosenblum, Co-Director Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities Ermal Garinger Academic Resource Center Pam LeRow and Paula Courtney, CLAS Digital Media Services Dean Thomas Heilke, Graduate Studies KU Center for Research Office of the Vice Provost for Equity and Diversity

VISION

To become the premiere enterprise for the reclamation of literary contributions by people of African descent in the United States to world culture. To keep before the public the works of African American authors and encourage scholarship in little explored or unexplored areas.

MISSION

To identify and advocate for the return of "fugitive texts" that have been lost to history; to promote the awareness of and create opportunities for learning about and engaging the works produced by African American authors; and to promote the development of scholarship on literature by African Americans.

GOALS

To create by 2015 a robust database of published fiction by African Americans; to secure permanent support for the Project; to promote an awareness of African American authors through teacher institutes, online and print publications, and presentations at conferences, book clubs and other venues.

Adopted at 2009 Meeting of the Advisory Board

Foreword

nstitution building is not a mystery. Nor is it the waving of magic wands from behind curtains or the sprinkling of pixie dust from the heavens. It is only through the efforts of dedicated, committed individuals who work collectively in pursuit of a unified vision that the Project on the History of Black Writing is entering its fourth decade. For these many years, a small group of tireless professors, headed by Founder/Director Maryemma Graham, and an equally dedicated group of enthusiastic graduate students have collaborated to build and to maintain HBW's status as an institution committed to the discovery and dissemination of writings that authors of African descent have produced on United States soil. The attached report for 2012-2014 offers a glimpse of the organization's work during that biennial period.

Central to its mission, HBW has continued to locate literary texts, develop its Digital Initiative, interview and film writers (The Gems Initiative), invite guests to engage with its Black Literary Suite, and host Summer Institutes for educators. Of special note in the Gems Initiative is a brief film about the significance of John A. Williams to the African American literary tradition. Even with 11 published volumes, Williams has garnered far less scholarly focus than such production warrants. HBW's film has the potential to encourage scholars to re-visit Williams and his work, undertake scholarship on him themselves, or encourage their colleagues and graduate students to take on such work. In addition to films already completed on Williams, Mari Evans, and Eugene B. Redmond, HBW anticipates continuing this practice of filming writers who have made extraordinary contributions to African American literary creativity.

As a result of successful grant writing, another initiative HBW brought to fruition similarly enhances its mission of dissemination. This was "Don't Deny My Voice: Reading and Teaching African American Poetry," a three-week Summer Institute held at the University of Kansas in 2013. Teachers from throughout the United States gathered in Lawrence to explore, under the able direction of Jerry W. Ward, Jr. and Joanne Veal Gabbin, along with a variety of stellar guest lecturers, the African American poetic tradition and the richness of teaching possibilities that it offers. Evaluations about the Institute were strikingly complimentary.

Whenever anyone mentions the Project on the History of Black Writing, Maryemma Graham and her successes come to mind. Less visible are the challenges of institution building. Never has the Project enjoyed sustained financial stability—though it has certainly received support from numerous individuals, administrators, and funding agencies. A pressing additional mission, therefore, is to reach a point where financial support is as impressive as the initiatives that HBW undertakes. When we can be as excited about our level of funding as we are about the books we discover or the international connections we make or the digital successes we applaud or the Summer Institutes we host, then we can truly assert that our institution building is solid on all foundations.

Trudier Harris HBW Advisory Board University Distinguished Research Professor Department of English, The University of Alabama

PROJECT DIRECTOR'S LETTER

am pleased to share with you this 2012-2014 biennial report from the Project on the History of Black Writing. As we began planning for our thirtieth anniversary in 2013, it became increasingly clear that HBW had not only lived up to its name as a documentary and public humanities project for more than three decades, but that we were also playing a key role in redefining the way we research and (re)present black writing. One of our major strengths is our collaborative work, a concept that was somewhat unusual when HBW began as the Computer Assisted Analysis of Black Literature in 1983 at the University of Mississippi. Today, collaboration has become a critical component for humanities scholars who not only wish to produce new and relevant knowledge, but who also seek to impact the world beyond the book. We see evidence of this everywhere. For example, both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Council of Learned Societies have dedicated funding for collaborative research.

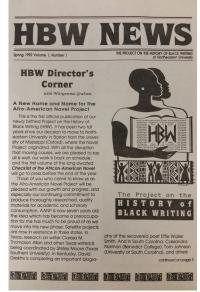


HBW Staff Member Kristin Joi Coffey consults a text from our novel collections.

HBW today locates itself in an uncertain space between print and digital cultures. Because the term "digital humanities" had not been invented in 1983, HBW in its mission, conception and design dared to suggest that we could use the computer to do what we had been doing manually faster and more efficiently, and that we could store this knowledge in a central place for mass distribution electronically. We identified graduate students who were in computer science and asked them to write programs that could meet our needs as literary scholars compiled data, organized it in specific fields and then generated reports for specific uses. We also considered the possibility of scanning documents, but the only scanners in Mississippi, our place of birth, were in the banks! When we looked into purchasing one, the cost was prohibitive. We continued to identify projects that were doing similar work to share ideas and experiences.

Much has happened in three decades, summed up in our biennial reports and early newsletters that have now become routine and are available on our website. However, our vision outstripped our capacity to fully execute our goals. While we received a first grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to create a "computerized database of African American novels" (CAABL), the expansion of digital environments proceeded largely without us. On the other hand, we began a most productive and long-term relationship with NEH. A 1987 grant allowed us to build our inventory that today includes more than 1000 little-known and/or recovered novels. Today we are hoping to make those texts more visible in the standard datasets. Meanwhile, those files traveled with us from Mississippi to Boston and finally to the University of Kansas, where we have been since 1999. In each of HBW's homes, graduate and undergraduate students have made us stronger and better, bringing their own vision to a project that thrives on innovation.

Since the twentieth, twenty-fifth, and thirtieth birthdays have all been at KU, KU has been the site of our most important



The first issue of HBW News, a newsletter we published while at Northeastern University, released Spring 1992.

work, including publishing the first comprehensive anthology of African American literature in the 21st century, reprinting seminal critical texts, recovering writers from the US and abroad, and expanding the global presence of African American writing.



Members of the KU contingent with other attendees of the Universitat Bielefeld conference on (Trans)Cultural Mobility: Giselle Anatol (KU English), Sherrie Tucker (KU AMS), Eve Dunbar (Vassar), Michel Habell-Pallán (U of Washington) and James Moreno, (KU Theatre, Dance).

HBW's network has grown immensely through our trend-setting conferences on Richard Wright in 1985, the three-year Langston Hughes National Poetry Project that began in 2002, and our collaboration with the Toni Morrison Society to inaugurate the Language Matters teaching initiative. We are now up to the number fourteen in our summer institutes and public programs funded by NEH between 1984 and 2014.

Making history at HBW is all part of expanding our work. In the biennial period between 2012 and 2014, we have worked with 13 undergraduate and graduate students, many of whom remained with us more than three years. New collaborations exist within the U.S. and we have international partners

committed to the study of black writing. While it's hard to measure the effect of these efforts in quantitative terms, no one can dispute that the KU Project on the History of Black Writing has gone far and beyond what we'd ever imagined.

As part of celebrating how far we have come, we believe it important to think about how we got here. Thus, our most important thirtieth anniversary initiative became our GEMS Project. Recalling our founding mission, our GEMS presentations bring the lives and works of writers out of the background to the foreground. Our recovery work is never done, and GEMS gives focused attention to a select group of writers we are currently sharing with a wide range of publics. There is much more information available now on Allen Polite (expatriate, Sweden) and poets Eugene Redmond and Mari Evans. Another project on John A. Williams is in process, making our third GEMS video available for classroom and research.

For most of our history, HBW has been associated with the writing of black fiction. However, the exponential interest in and the increased visibility of black poetry has demanded more attention from us. Notification for our fourteenth NEH grant came in 2012, and we hosted "Don't Deny My Voice: Reading and Teaching African American Poetry" in the summer of 2013 with a remarkable group of college and university faculty. Our Grants Coordinator Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt and her team, including institute co-directors Jerry W. Ward, Jr., and Joanne Gabbin did such an outstanding job that a second institute proposal was written, submitted, and funded. We look forward to "Black Poetry after the Black Arts Movement" in 2015.

Although we were preoccupied with anniversary planning and preparations in 2013-2014, we wrote a second NEH grant proposal for Black Book Interactive Project (BBIP), our first fully digital project. The project expands possibilities for collaboration as it provides opportunities for HBW's student staff to take another skill set with them into the professional arena.



An image of poet jessica Care moore from the "Voicing America" exhibit that was part of the "Don't Deny My Voice" NEH Summer 2013 Institute.

At HBW, we like to say that once you come on board, you are always part of the HBW family. Nevertheless, we do say our goodbye's and thank you's to Lacey McAfee, our faithful communications coordinator who spent her entire undergrad career at HBW; and Kenton Rambsy, our Project Digital Coordinator and trailblazer, who left to write his dissertation with a Hall Center Fellowship. Likewise, we welcomed KU sophomore Crystal Bradshaw as Lacey's most capable successor, and Meredith Wiggins, PhD student in African American literature, as our new PDI Coordinator, whose innovative ideas have already transformed our blogspot http://projecthbw.blogspot.com/.

HBW could not exist without the support of the KU English Department and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. CLAS Dean Danny Anderson was instrumental in helping to stabilize HBW after a few rocky years. We wish to thank our Advisory Board, especially Dr. Trudier Harris, who is HBW's "true believer," and Dr. Howard Rambsy, without whom we would never have ventured into the genre of poetry. Thanks to retiring member Edgar Tidwell for his ideas and support over the last several years. Founding board member Jerry W. Ward accepted emeritus status but remains the intellectual center of our work and ever-popular blogspot. Members of the administrative staff of the KU English Department keep us sure and steady, especially Lori Whitten, Robin Holladay, and Lydia Ash, tolerating an overload of work without complaint. Finally, we remain grateful to the Ermal Garinger Academic Resource Center, Jonathan Perkins and Keah Cunningham, and Digital Media Services, Pam LeRow and Paula Courtney, who believe in excellence and make sure that we achieve it. We wish to celebrate these three decades with all of you.

yommagaha.

Maryemma Graham University Distinguished Professor Department of English Founder and Director

The Project Digital Initiative and Project Manager's Report 2012-2014

- Kenton Rambsy

As the Project Digital Initiative Coordinator for HBW from August 2010 to the summer of 2014, I collaborated with colleagues and initiated numerous public digital projects. The first of these, the Black Literary Blog, filled a notable void by offering consistent posts dedicated to the history of African American fiction and literary topics more generally. The blog provided an online venue where graduate students could publish alongside established literary scholars such as Jerry Ward, Jr., Frank Dobson, Gregory Rutledge, and Maryemma Graham. The online writing and editorial work for the blog allowed us to share ideas, literary art, and history with broad readerships. A significant addition to our blog were the guest bloggers who composed entries concerning the connections between Black literature, history, social geographies, text mining, and popular culture.

The "100 Novels Project" was one of the most notable of our projects. With the support of HBW staff member Goyland Williams (MA, AAAS, 2014), the "100 Novels Project" developed into a collection system that analyzed over six dozen factors related to texts, publication, publisher and author data, story settings, and protagonist demographics to discover significant trends in African American book history. The findings from the "100 Novels Project" provided three mixed media exhibits that became Black Literary Suites. We expanded this research to apply for an internal grant from the KU Center for Research,



Attendees take a self-guided audio tour of the Black Literary Suite 2013 poster display.

bringing more staff on board to expand the pilot project. Will Cunningham and I became the lead graduate researchers who expanded the "100 Novels Project" in preparation for an NEH grant from the Digital Humanities Division. The goal of the "Black Book Project" is to digitize and create the model for an interactive research database that makes use of text-mining, topic modeling, and mapping software.

A major overhaul of office infrastructure enabled us to downsize materials by donating journals and other print documents to several organizations, including Spencer Research Library, where they can have greater use value. We accomplished this reduction in our print holdings by digitizing important resources and recycling redundant materials. The newly renovated office, especially the elimination of filing cabinets, added additional work areas and a more comfortable and efficient work environment. Ultimately, our office became more inviting, structurally and aesthetically sound, as we attracted researchers and increased our collaborative projects.

Perhaps my most important contribution was overseeing the inventory process and the development of a finding aid. HBW boasts collections of rare novels, journals, assorted anthologies, books of literary criticism, and anthologies totaling over 3,000 items. The holdings are now organized and indexed. The next stage is merging with KU Libraries for increased accessibility.

My time as Office Manager/Project Digital Initiative Coordinator has not only advanced my knowledge of African American literary and digital scholarship but also my development as a public humanist and organizer.

DON'T DENY MY VOICE: READING AND TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN POETRY

National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute

- Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt, HBW Grants Coordinator and Don't Deny My Voice Institute Coordinator

Don't Deny My Voice: Reading and Teaching African American Poetry, a National Endowment for the Humanities summer institute sponsored by KU's Project on the History of Black Writing and the Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University, brought together 50 scholars of African American poetry, from graduate students just beginning their careers to the scholars leading the field, with a few living legends thrown in for good measure. For three weeks in late July and early August, 2013 the NEH Summer



NEH Summer Scholars hard at work.

Scholars and faculty engaged in an intensive study of the relevant social, linguistic, literary and methodological elements of African American poetry today.

HBW celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 2013, which means thirty years of research, recovery work and publications in the field of African American literature; thirty years of building bridges between scholars and the various communities we serve. It seemed appropriate, then, when we proposed HBW's tenth NEH institute, that we focused our attention on addressing the contradiction between black poetry's national and international reputation and its understudied, marginalized status in academic discourse and published scholarship.



Frank X Walker (University of Kentucky), Kentucky Poet Laureate and NEH Summer Scholar, gives a reading in the Spencer Museum of Art's Teaching Gallery, the site of the "Voicing America" exhibit curated specifically for the Institute.

Our Institute took its title from Lorenzo Thomas' posthumous book, Don't Deny My Name: Words and Music and the Black Intellectual Tradition. Thomas reminded us that "Every poet must confront a serious problem: how to reconcile one's private preoccupation with the need to make poetry that is both accessible and useful to others." Thomas (1944-2005) stood as our Institute's guiding spirit. Not only was he a leading intellectual who helped to shape ideas about American and African American poetry and expressive culture with his critical studies and his



Opal Moore (Spelman College) speaks to the Institute participants.

poetry, he was also one of the most engaged scholars of our time and the intellectual mentor to many of the faculty who led the Institute.

Twenty-four individuals were selected to participate in the Institute from a highly competitive pool of applicants. We were pleased to welcome to Lawrence these NEH Summer Scholars representing colleges and universities throughout the country and a wide range of backgrounds and experience levels. Included were brand-new PhDs and veteran teachers from community colleges, smaller liberal arts colleges

and HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities)—a truly national group from nineteen states. These twenty-four NEH Summer Scholars arrived at KU in mid-July eager and ready to work.

Meeting daily in the Malott Room of the Kansas Union, our first week was led by resident faculty and Institute co-director Joanne Gabbin (James Madison University) and Jerry W. Ward, Jr. (Central China Normal University) and focused on the traditions of black poetry in America from 1900-1960. Daily lectures and discussions were led by the week's resident faculty, as well as visiting scholars Aldon Nielsen (Pennsylvania State University), Carmaletta Williams (Johnson County Community College), R. Baxter Miller (University of Georgia) and John Edgar Tidwell (KU). Additionally, the Spencer Museum of Art, one of the Institute's campus sponsors, along with

the Office of the Chancellor, hosted an opening panel that examined the role of the community and educators in research and recovery efforts of poetry collections and archives. The panel was followed by a reception in the Spencer's atrium and the opening of "Voicing America," an exhibit curated specifically for the Institute and featuring multimedia works from the Museum's collection, as well as photographs by C.B. Claiborne.



Panelists Joseph Harrington (KU English), Nicole Hodges Persley (KU Theatre) and Jill Kuhnheim (KU Spanish and Portuguese) discuss "Poetry and Its Publics."

Howard Rambsy II (Southern

Illinois University-Edwardsville) served as resident faculty for week two and led our examination of the aesthetics and production of black poetry from 1960-1980. William J. Harris (KU) and Tony Grooms (Kennesaw State University) served as visiting faculty. One highlight of week two was a conversation with Mrs. Helene Polite, widow of Black Arts poet and expatriate, Allen Polite, from Sweden via Skype. We were also thrilled to welcome poet Eugene Redmond to campus for an interview and powerful performance.

Our final week looked at contemporary black poetics from 1980 to the present and was led by Tony Bolden (KU). Week three featured visiting scholars Opal Moore (Spelman College), Evie Shockley (Rutgers University), Meta DuEwa Jones (University of Texas - Austin), Adam Bradley (University of Colorado) and acclaimed artist and poet Tracie Morris (Pratt Institute). Additionally, an interdisciplinary group of KU scholars gave a panel discussion on "Poetry and Its Publics" at the Hall Center for the Humanities on campus.

Though the majority of our time was spent in study, discussion and reflection, there was time for performance, fellowship, and even tourism! Many of the NEH Summer Scholars are poets themselves, so Sunday afternoons found the group upstairs at Genovese Restaurant for poetry readings and performances. One of the NEH Summer Scholars, Frank X Walker, the 2013-2014 Kentucky Poet Laureate, gave a reading in the Spencer Museum of Art's Teaching Gallery. Three weeks away from home had participants and faculty alike hungering for some home-cooked food and John Edgar Tidwell generously opened his home and kitchen for a Friday evening fish-fry. The group traveled to Kansas City's 18th and Vine District one Saturday to visit the Mid-America Black Archives, the American Jazz Museum and the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. They also visited the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka. On Sunday, a small group attended services at the St. Luke AME in Lawrence, popularly known as the "Langston Hughes" church.

HBW Staff and KU students Kenton Rambsy, Goyland Williams, Jaime Whitt, Lacey McAffee, Kristin Lockridge and Shayn Guillemette all provided invaluable support for the Institute. In addition to the funding received from NEH, the Institute was made possible with generous support from the Department of English, the Office of the Chancellor, the Office of the Provost, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, KU Libraries, KU Center for Research, Spencer Museum of Art, and the Ermal Garinger Academic Resource Center.

The Institute website features highlight videos, as well as the full interview with Eugene Redmond. <u>http://dontdeny.ku.edu/institute/videos.shtml</u>



DDMV library featuring texts of and about African American poetry by Institute faculty and participants.

Don't Deny My Voice: Reading and Teaching African American Poetry

NEH SUMMER SCHOLAR TESTIMONIALS

"The Institute was thorough and detailed. The greatest benefit to me was an opportunity to map the African American poetic tradition from its beginning to current time. I was able to identify major works and authors I have not yet engaged, develop a sense of the major themes and goals, and obtain a sense of the evolution of the tradition. As a result, I will be able to better identify, discuss and engage my students through syllabi and course materials that carefully choose authors and works that reflect these developments." – NEH Summer Scholar

"The overall arc of the seminar worked effectively, giving us a greater grounding in the continuity of the traditions of African American poetry." – NEH Summer Scholar

"I learned a multitude of things, including pedagogical approaches, during this Institute. The organizers clearly put together a rigorous three weeks that aimed to approach African American poetry in a coherent and methodical manner with innovative discussions and presentations throughout. There is no way to measure how much I learned and gained during the Institute, but African American poetry will be present in all my future course syllabi and I am confident in teaching different poets and time periods." – NEH Summer Scholar

"This was an amazingly enriching experience, which I can already envision incorporating into both my teaching and scholarship. In addition to being exposed to a number of theoretical frameworks through which to approach African American poetry in my own work, we also regularly discussed the potential implications of our discussions within the classroom setting." – NEH Summer Scholar

"What a productive week! There were concrete models provided for both reading and teaching the poetry. What really impressed me this week, however, was that were given tangible items to take with us to our classrooms. We were also exposed to a host of Black Arts poetry that may have been overlooked in anthologies (or the lack thereof). [Resident Faculty] Rambsy gave us a different perspective on the Black Arts movement, and his creativity in teaching and community efforts has served as an inspiration." – NEH Summer Scholar

"[Resident Faculty] Dr. Rambsy has been incredibly generous in sharing his ideas and strategies as a teacher. I feel like I've been given not just teaching tips but a whole new paradigm for how to set up and relate to a class." – NEH Summer Scholar

"I not only have new material to teach, a fresh approach to old subject material, but perhaps most importantly a new network of smart, committed colleagues that are interested in making African American poetry accessible and exciting for a new generation of students." – NEH Summer Scholar

"On a very personal note, I must say that I greatly appreciated the way our organizers and resident faculty members strove to build community among the scholars very early on. This made for a rich and moving three weeks with colleagues who were immediately very invested in the institute. In addition, opportunities for scholars to share their work and ideas were abundant. I especially appreciated that modeling of inclusive pedagogical practices in which the power in a classroom space is decentered. The level of collegiality was great and allowed for amicable intellectual sparring." – NEH Summer Scholar

"Many sessions entailed multimedia, all of which worked. Many participants expressed gratitude during the institute for being able to use such high quality resources, esp. since the same high quality or extensiveness is not available at their home institutions. I shared this reaction." – NEH Summer Scholar



NEH Summer Scholars, faculty and staff at the conclusion of a successful Summer Institute.

2013 NEH Summer Scholars

Paula Barnes, Hampton University, Hampton, VA Zanice Bond, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, AL Michelle Branton, Garden City Community College, Garden City, KS Reginald Flood, Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic, CT Deborah Ford, Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, MS Hoke "Brother Yao" Glover, Bowie State University, Bowie, MD Kamau Kemayo, University of Illinois - Springfield, Springfield, IL Shawna Kirlew, Howard University, Washington, DC Carla Lester, Bethune-Cookman University, Daytona Beach, FL April Logan, Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD Jeff Mack, Albany State University, Albany, GA McKinley Melton, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA Gregg Murray, Georgia Perimeter College, Dunwoody, GA Michelle Pinkard, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ Erin Ranft, University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX Chris Rose, Portland Community College, Portland, OR Sarah RudeWalker, Penn State University, University Park, PA Matt Schumacher, Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, OR Arlette Smith, St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY Lorrie Smith, Saint Michael's College, Colchester, VT Althea Tait, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA Carol Tyx, Mount Mercy University, Cedar Rapids, IA Frank X Walker, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY Jeff Westover, Boise State University, Boise, ID

HBW @ 30: THE GEMS INITIATIVE

-Jerry W. Ward, Jr. HBW Board Member Emeritus

In 2012, as part of our 30th anniversary planning, the Project on the History of Black Writing established its GEMS Initiative to promote rigorous scholarship and to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of "forgotten" or "less-than-well-known" writers and artists to African American writing and culture. Our GEMS presentations bring their lives and works to the foreground of discussion. They remind us that recovery efforts are always ongoing. The presentations may include interviews, video materials, biographical summaries, critical assessments and bibliographic information on a particular writer. Each GEMS project has a lead researcher who is working collaboratively with an HBW support team. Members of the team often engage in new projects based on their GEMS work. With permission from the authors or their families, the video material produced for these projects will be made available on YouTube and is intended for research purposes only.

Our first presentation was a video on Mari Evans. It focuses on the remarkable life and achievements of Mari Evans, writer, composer, intellectual, filmmaker, television host, anthologist, and essayist, who has penetrating ideas about literary, artistic, and sociopolitical responsibilities. The ten-minute video opened the 2014 Conference on College Composition and Communication (4 C's) in Indianapolis, Indiana, where Evans received special recognition. We are grateful to Nikky Finney, who agreed to introduce the video with a powerful statement on Evans's influence on her development as well as on subsequent generations of writers and artists. Lead researcher for the video was MA student and HBW staffer Shayn Guillemette, who together with another MA student and HBW staffer Alysha Griffin, visited Evans in her Indianapolis home for a lengthy interview. The conversation revealed rich new information that motivated Guillemette to write his Master's thesis on Evans. The resulting work "ECONOMIC AND SPATIAL (IM)MOBILITY



Mari Evans

IN MARI EVANS'S *STATIONS:* A QUESTION OF ETHOS," an exploration of one of Evans's littleknown plays, is currently being revised for publication. The HBW research and production team members for the video included Crystal Bradshaw and Kenton Rambsy. We welcomed retired educator and musician Howard Rambsy, Sr. to HBW as our GEMS video producer. The video "A Tribute to Mari Evans" can be found here <u>http://hbw.ku.edu/tribute-mari-evans</u>.

With the encouragement of Ishmael Reed, research for the second GEMS presentation on the life and works of John A. Williams began in spring, 2014. We are indebted to the Williams family and to special collections at the University of Rochester for their cooperation in this effort. The research for this project began with Kris Coffey, HBW staffer and PhD student in the Creative Writing Program. PDI Coordinator Meredith Wiggins, Crystal Bradshaw, Kenton Rambsy and Howard Rambsy, Sr. are the collaborating team for the video project.

We also include in our GEMS repertoire a live interview with renowned poet, scholar, photographer, and East St. Louis Poet Laureate Eugene Redmond. Redmond's participation in our NEH-sponsored Summer Institute *Don't Deny My Voice: Reading and Teaching African American Poetry* (2013) provided an opportunity to talk at length about his career, the Black Arts Movement, and the creation of his seminal work, *Drumvoices: The Mission of Afro-American Poetry* (1976).

Although many consider *Drumvoices* the most important study of African American Poetry. The NEH summer institute special edition of this invaluable resource is making its way back into America's classrooms through our NEH Summer Scholars, accompanied by Redmond's revealing interview and dynamic performance. The full interview is available here <u>https://www. youtube.com/watch?list=PLFua9bF0-</u> MFR0mMJqwAb8VMn85i_ nnsbP&v=AcPPppKqYvc.



Eugene Redmond and Jerry Ward, Jr.

The GEMS initiative showcases the best of HBW: research driven, it uses technology to create new knowledge for the humanities that can be shared with multiple publics. Most importantly, it fosters a collaborative working environment that builds on the expertise of many.

THE BLACK LITERARY SUITE: BOOKS TALKING BACK

In the academic year 2011-12, the Project on the History of Black Writing inaugurated a series of self-guided exhibits, or Black Literary Suites (BLS). As part of the Project Digital Initiative, the BLS sought to give HBW more visibility on the KU campus and to present important critical information



The Black Literary Suite: Wikipedia Edition was on display at KU Libraries from March 15-April 27, 2012.

for a larger number of African American writers and writing and to present the information with the use of technology. The first Black Literary Suite, with selections from the "100 Novels Project," opened March 16, 2011 at the Kansas Union. The 100 Novels Project explored and celebrated the political, social, cultural and historical significance of 100 assorted texts. The temporal scope is wide ranging, spanning from the late 19th century to the 21st century. Many of the works have been transformed into film and were staples on the New York Times bestseller list. Visitors to the exhibit used MP3 players to guide them through the exhibit's fourteen panels independently.

On Thursday, October 6, 2011, HBW presented its second showcasing, "Black Literary Suite:

New York Edition." For this walk-through, multimedia exhibit, MP3 players provided viewers with commentaries and topical displays related to the period. The New York Edition continued to use the 100 novels database to identify the central topics of migration and location in African American literature. For the twenty-three novels featured in this exhibit, NYC—most often, Harlem—was a central location for each novel's storyline. One conclusion we might draw is that urban areas such as New York City not only provide family settings positioning their narratives, but they also resonate with the demographic shifts occurring in the twentieth century. At the same time, one wonders if some novels received less attention or interest from publishers because they reflected non-urban settings.



Visitors to the Black Literary Suites use MP3 players to guide them through the exhibit's panels independently.

For a third Black Literary Suite, HBW teamed up with the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities at the KU Libraries to host an extended exhibit from March 15- April 27, 2012. The suite focused on Wikipedia and African American Literature. In the "100 Novels Project," 49 of the novels have Wikipedia pages. "The Black Literary Suite: Wikipedia Edition" examined the particular ways in which the online website presents the novels. Numerous studies have attested to the validity of Wikipedia. Wikipedia's influence on larger audience's perceptions of African American literature is notable especially given the ways in which readers access information about black writers. For example, entering "Richard Wright" or "Toni Morrison" into a

Google search will generate a Wikipedia entry within the first two sites.

The Black Literary Suites shed light on HBW collections by using quantitative statistics to reveal more composite information about African American novel history. The project is particularly useful for securing information about practices and trends. The correlation of more than eight dozen factors—publication and author data as well as fictional elements like setting and protagonist demographics—yields information for mapping the publishing history of black novels through identifiable patterns. One of the major goals of this project is to shed new light on the holdings in HBW's novel collection and stimulate more conversations about what we can learn, especially what we can gain by studying more than a single book at a time. What trends do we see that point us to new questions about readers, writers, publishers, and the critical apparatus that surrounds a book's appearance and longevity. How do books talk back to us?

HBW Update: Expanding our Global Presence

HBW's international work has taken many forms over the years, from the first international symposium on Richard Wright at the University of Mississippi in 1985, participation in the centennial celebration of Richard Wright in Japan and Paris in 2009, the visit by Julia Wright to the University of Kansas for the Wright Connection NEH Summer institute in 2010, and the NEH funded Language Matters seminar in Paris in fall 2010. Most recently, HBW has joined forces with an InterAmerican Studies (IAS) Project, organized out of Bielefeld University, Germany. IAS expands American Studies to the Americas – North, South and the Caribbean, but currently has a wider presence in Europe than the United States.



Julia Wright signs copies of her father's books after a public lecture at the Spencer Museum of Art in 2010.

As part of this effort Maryemma Graham visited Germany to serve as Visiting Scholar in Gender Studies at the University of Bielefeld, making three visits in 2012 and 2013. In May 6-8, 2013,

Graham teamed up with Dr. Wilfried Raussert, chair of American Studies at Bielefeld University, to co-direct the inaugural conference, "(Trans)cultural Mobility: Traveling Ideas, Images, Sounds and Ideas in the Americas," held at the Zif Center for Interdisciplinary Research at Bielefeld. The conference had a strong representation from KU faculty. In addition to Graham, Giselle Anatol (English), Sherrie Tucker (AMS), and James Morena (Theatre and Dance) presented papers.

To continue the IAS dialogue, HBW hosted Raussert at KU, with support from the Office of International Studies as part of the 60th anniversary of KU's American Studies Program. Raussert introduced the concept of InterAmerican Studies to faculty and grad students, met with prospective students and faculty interested in exchange programs in Bielefeld and in Latin America, and initiated a joint agreement proposal between KU (American Studies) and Bielefeld University. The IAS project continues its work with an inaugural volume, *Mobile and Entangled America(s)*, to be published by Ashgate in 2016. Edited by Graham and Raussert, the book will help to consolidate the field by



The "(Trans)cultural Mobility: Traveling Ideas, Images, Sounds and Ideas in the Americas" program cover.

bringing together the current interest in mobility studies and the New American studies. Intended to serve as a critical sourcebook for internationalizing American Cultural Studies, it explores those processes through which ideas, images, sounds, and texts travel in the Americas and beyond from a transcultural and interdisciplinary perspective.

The work of HBW graduate staff members has also helped in our ongoing recovery work. Kristin Coffey, in addition to serving as the main point of contact for Mrs. Helene Polite, who spoke about her late husband Allen Polite via Skype during *Don't Deny My Voice* NEH Summer Institute (2013), began building both a critical and literary bibliography on the lives and works of African American writers who migrated to Europe during the interwar period (1918-1941). Her research involves a core of primary questions that will be useful for others engaged in IAS recovery efforts. These questions follow:



Helene Polite Skypes with Professor Tony Grooms and the DDMV participants about the work of her late husband, poet Allan Polite.

• What literary works were published during the interwar period and which ones reflected South to North to Europe migration?

- In which genres did writers write about and publish their experiences, autobiography, fiction, poetry or other?
- What European cities other than Paris had a large influx of African Americans during the early twentieth century? How does this expand our concept of African American diasporic writers of the early twentieth century?

• What was the connection between the music (jazz) and the literary scene in Paris during the interwar period? For example, Columbia University's Center for Jazz Studies has already launched a project that looks at African American musics in Paris following World War II, but how does this connect to the earlier period?

• How did writers and artists circulate information about their experiences domestically and internationally?

• What are the demographics for these writers, especially in terms of gender? Do the subjects they discuss in their works—migration and race relations, for example—differ based on gender?

• What was the status of most of those African Americans migrating to Europe? If they were primarily military, when did non-military blacks begin to migrate and why? Did writers have reasons to migrate different from others?

• Was the cost of traveling and/or migration to Europe funded by an organization, and if so, which ones?

• What happened to the literary scene after the 1920s, especially with regard to the polarization of black/white Americans in Europe?

As part of HBW's expanded recovery work and the InterAmerican Project which is producing important work on writers such as James Emmanuel and Allen Polite, both of whom migrated to Europe during the early 1960s, Kris' research and bibliography will help us to historicize and contextualize a parallel or precursor to the Black Arts Movement.

THE BLACK BOOK PILOT PROJECT

-Kenton Rambsy and Will Cunningham

The field of Digital Humanities lacks any significant, sustained project associated with the study of African American Literature. The goal of the "Black Book Pilot Project" (BBPP) is to develop a critical, quantitative, and qualitative tool for a thorough and ongoing assessment of texts that reflect the larger, more inclusive tradition of black writing. As part of our ongoing commitment to the recovery, preservation, and study of African American Literature, the most natural "next step" in the utilization of our archives of black texts is the creation of a digital tool that allows researchers access to a unified, representative body of literature. This tool will not only bring to the table an under-represented field of study in the Digital Humanities, but it will also allow researchers the opportunity to engage in comparative scholarship with texts previously unknown even within the academic community. This platform will allow learners to engage and analyze texts with both the classic skills of close reading alongside a more global, comprehensive survey of larger patterns and movements as the black literary canon developed from the mid-19th century through contemporary writers.

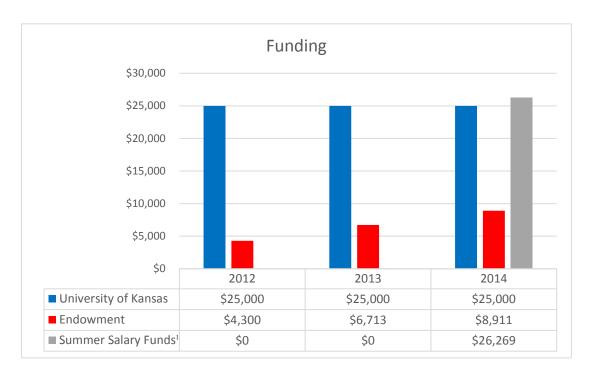
This project is innovative on two levels: (a) On the global level, the Black Book Project is the process of developing a tool that grants access to a comprehensive set of data that has heretofore been unavailable to scholars. (b) Driven by the desire to see texts in new ways and establish exciting new connections between seemingly-unrelated texts, the BBPP makes use of heavily indexed meta-data combined with topic modeling and mapping software that will serve as a visual, interactive experience with the texts and allow data mining across multiple texts.

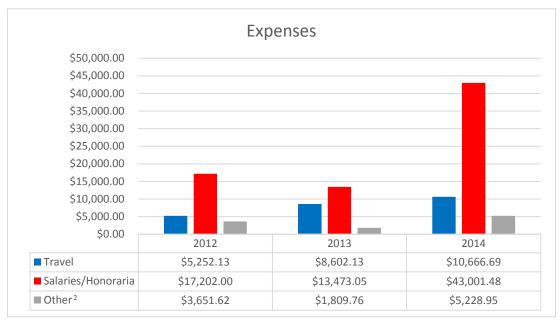
BBPP hopes to develop a sustainable, replicable research model for literature, American culture studies, and the Digital Humanities that (a) offers a more systematic examination of larger data sets (collected, but inaccessible works), (b) asks and answers different questions and new theories about book creation, publication, and circulation, and (c) challenges conventional interpretations of literature, literacy, textuality, and the black canon. Looking more precisely at highly indexed data, we can better determine why we call texts "classic" and why not. Reviewing

closely more texts within the African American writing tradition broadens our teaching canon just as it tells us why we privilege some texts over others.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, based on the pilot study, Will Cunningham and Kenton Rambsy completed the draft of a grant application, the next step, renaming it the Black Book Interactive Project (BBIP), based on the pilot study. The overall goal of BBIP is to act as an assistant and navigator for scholars wishing to shift the focus of African American novel history from one or two novels to a wider range of representative texts starting with *Clotel* in 1853. Relying on text-mining software, mapping and geo-tagging, indexed thematic and publication content, and visual representations, this interactive database will allow users to ask specific and broad questions about a grouping of texts and how it corresponds to the larger field of African American literature. Ultimately, an interactive database can allow scholars to customize their own research questions and topics as they move forward to gain a deeper understanding of black print culture.

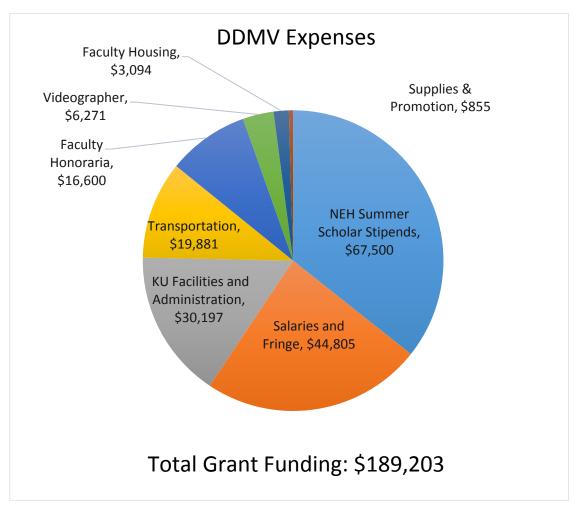
FINANCIAL REPORT





¹ Beginning in 2014, Maryemma Graham began reserving a portion of her annual salary to fund HBW work during the summer months.

² "Other" items include fees, hardware, hospitality, postage, printing/advertising and supplies.



NEH does not permit grant funds be spent on food, drink or hospitality. \$3,850 in combined funds were contributed by KU's Offices of the Chancellor and Provost, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Department of English to provide several group meals and daily coffee service.

GRANT PROPOSALS 2012-2014

With glowing evaluations from the Summer 2013 Institute "Don't Deny My Voice: Reading and Teaching African American Poetry" and strong encouragement from NEH to submit a proposal for a sequel, HBW proposed "Black Poetry after the Black Arts Movement" as an NEH Summer 2015 Institute. Funding in the amount of \$156,527 was granted in August 2014.

In September 2014, HBW submitted its first proposal to NEH's Office of Digital Humanities for the "Black Book Interactive Project," a Level II Start-Up Grant in the amount of \$60,000 to create a demonstration project that will model a metadata schema. Funding will be announced in spring 2015.

CLA: OUR 30th and 31st Conferences

2013 College Language Association Convention

The 2013 College Language Association Convention was held in Lexington, Kentucky April 10-13, 2013. Scholars and critics of African American literature, language, and culture examined "Mason-Dixon and Maginot Lines: Borders, Boundaries and Barriers in Languages and Literatures."



L to R: Kenton Rambsy, Antwan Walker (Georgia Gwinnett College) and Rynetta Davis (U of Kentucky)

HBW sponsored a roundtable "The Black Book: Celebrating Thirty Years with the Project on the History of Black Writing" that featured retrospective and prospective looks at HBW from a variety of viewpoints, including original staff member Susanne Dietzel, PhD in Women's Studies, who joined the project as a grad student at the University of Mississippi; Doretha Williams, PhD in American Studies, who began her journey with HBW at the University of Kansas; and Kenton Rambsy, University of Kansas PhD student, the newest member of the team and current project coordinator. They considered the contribution of HBW to literary studies as well as to their own development as scholars. We heard briefly from HBW's Director and Founder, Maryemma Graham, on the original mission of HBW and its unique concept of a "humanities research/ teaching laboratory." Long time HBW board

member Trudier Harris commented on the impact of HBW in the public sphere, while Joanne Gabbin focused her remarks on the importance of collaboration as director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center, one of HBW's partner projects. Howard Rambsy, HBW board member, chaired the roundtable. To help us look backward, we began with a brief video history of HBW.

2014 College Language Association Convention

In 2014, HBW traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana, for the 74th annual College Language Association Convention. From March 26-29, scholars and critics of African American literature, language, and culture came together to celebrate "Pathways and Porticos: The Caribbean and the South as Catalyst in Languages and Literatures."

It was a particularly exciting year for HBW, as we kicked off the conference bright and early Thursday morning with our inaugural New Scholars Panel. Chaired by HBW Board member Trudier Harris, the panel featured five current or former University of Kansas graduate students presenting work around the theme of "Reading and Writing the South, Africa, and the African Atlantic: Old Worlds, New Narratives and the Spaces in Between." Dr. DaMaris B. Hill, now working at the University of Kentucky, shared original poetry. William Cunningham IV considered the functions of space and wood in Faulkner's *Light in August*. Creighton Nicholas Brown also addressed ideas about space and place and their interactions with tourism in Julia Alvarez's *A Wedding in Haiti*. Ashley Ortiz turned her eye toward the depiction of faith and folk healing in U.S. Latina literatures, and Meredith Wiggins applied a postcolonial disability studies lens to Suzan-Lori Parks's play *Venus*.

Advisory Board Meetings 2012-2014

HBW ADVISORY BOARD MEETING 2013

Held at CLA Convention, Lexington, KY. April 13, 2013

On Saturday, April 13, at the conclusion of CLA, the HBW advisory board held its meeting to discuss both immediate plans and long-term goals for the project. Ira Revels, guest consultant, joined the board for a preliminary discussion of digital humanities grants and the Black Book Project.

Discussion focused on the GEMS project and the Black Book Interactive Project, as well as grants as a source of ongoing funding, the status of the HBW inventory, and the possibility of starting an endowment, since HBW is currently operating with an expendable account.

HBW Advisory Board Meeting 2014

Held at CLA Convention, New Orleans, LA. March 29-30, 2014

As has become tradition, HBW held its advisory board meeting as CLA came to a close. On Saturday, March 29, and Sunday, March 30, HBW staff members and board members met to discuss both immediate plans and long-term goals for the project. Friday's meeting was largely devoted to a discussion of the Black Book Project, a planned NEH grant that will bring metadata and tagging to a wide body of African American novels in order to make their common traits more widely available to scholars and readers. While digitizing black texts is a part of this project, its true aim is to make it easier to put texts in conversation with one another based on factors related to publication, theme, and so on. Saturday's meeting focused on building up systems already in place to help HBW remain a sustainable project in the long term, such as continued digital initiatives, ideas for fundraising, and recruitment of new supporters.



Clockwise, from far left: Will Cunningham (kneeling); Prof. Lianggong Luo; Dr. John Edgar Tidwell; Dr. Jerry W. Ward; Dr. Maryemma Graham; Dr. Carmaletta Williams; Dr. Trudier Harris; Dr. Susanne Dietzel; Ira Revels; Lacey McAfee; Dr. Howard Rambsy II; Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt; Dr. Kenton Rambsy; Goyland Williams; Dr. Amy Earhart

THE PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF BLACK WRITING: A BRIEF Synopsis of 30 years

In 2013, the Project on the History of Black Writing (HBW) will celebrate its 30th year.

- Originally known as the Computer Assisted Analysis of Black Literature (CAABL), we became the Afro-American Novel Project (AANP) to reflect the specific focus of our funded work. HBW began in 1983 at the University of Mississippi, Oxford. In addition to gathering an electronic database and verifying more than 1000 novels, we published *The Afro-American Novel: A Guide for Teachers and Students* (1986), and acquired a permanent collection of novels and interviews with major writers. In 1989 the project relocated to Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts.
- At Northeastern, the Project continued to expand its holdings to create A Checklist of the Afro-American Novel, 1853-1990 (1990). We also made our first appearance at the annual meeting of the College Language Association, which began our annual scholarly panels, and lively presentations by established and new writers at CLA's April conference.
- Officially under the new name of the Project on the History of Black Writing, during the Northeastern years, the Project inaugurated its first professional development workshops for teachers and assisted younger scholars in securing summer research opportunities. Two NEH-funded grants provided support for a group of educators to mentor others in teaching African American literature. That project continued over a four-year period, and featured a collaborative publication from the institutes: *Teaching African American Literature, Theory and Practice* (Routledge 1998).
- Gaining an affiliation with the Smithsonian's Museum of American History and the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (ASALH), HBW secured additional funding from NEH to conduct a second series of professional development institutes, "The Middle Passage: The Making of the Atlantic World," based at Howard University in Washington, DC, in 1997 and the summer of 1998.
- During the same period, HBW received a two-year grant from the Lemelson Foundation of Hampshire College to expand its technology component; we spent two years developing a prototype for a CD-ROM. The result was "Neither Bond Nor Free: An Anthology of Rare African- American Texts," a completely digitized anthology with information about the author and the period, which provided the model for the later PDI.
- In 1999, the Project moved to the University of Kansas, Lawrence. With funds from Microsoft and the Kansas Endowment Association, HBW took a second step in expanding digital access. We joined the team, headed by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., that produced *Encarta Africana: Library of Black America.* Full texts of seventy-five African American novels from our collection became available as a CD-ROM.
- In 2002, the Project initiated a successful, long-term partnership with Cambridge University Press. *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Novel*, released in early 2004, and *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*, released in early 2011, add significantly to the Project's reputation not only as a leading archival collection in African American literature, but as a major producer of scholarly works that aid the study and interpretation of African American literature for all academic levels.

- Continuing as the most important base of external support, NEH awarded six grants to HBW between 2001 and 2012. In 2001 and 2003, respectively, HBW received funds for The Langston Hughes National Poetry Project to both plan and implement "Speaking of Rivers: Taking Poetry to the People." In 2002, working with the Toni Morrison Society, HBW's professional development work continued with "Language Matters I," a humanities focus grant for Washington, DC area teachers, and in 2004, "Language Matters II: Reading and Teaching Toni Morrison," a national workshop for teachers. Directed and coordinated out of the HBW office, these programs were highly successful in promoting the reading and study of major African American authors to a diverse national audience. The professional development work continued with a national institute, "Making the Wright Connection: Reading Native Son, Black Boy, and Uncle Tom's Children" (July 2010), and "Language Matters IV: Reading and Teaching Toni Morrison in Translation" in Paris (November 2010). In July 2012 NEH granted funds for HBW's most current project, a three week summer 2013 institute for college teachers, hosted at KU, titled "Don't Deny My Voice: Reading and Teaching African American Poetry."
- Since its inception, the bulk of the Project's work has been concerned with the study of the African American novel. The Project has emphasized the importance of knowledge dissemination, while retaining its primary emphasis upon recovery and documentation of an African American narrative tradition. 2011-2012 saw efforts from HBW on the "re-discovery" of expatriate African American author Allen Polite and the re-publication of two of his poetry collections: *Poems* (1996) and *Looka Here, Now* (1997).
- The 21st century continues to bring new dimensions to the Project. In addition to efforts on the digital front (<u>www.hbw.ku.edu</u>; Facebook page: Project on the History of Black Writing; @projectHBW on Twitter), 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. Linking the concept of literature with literacy as we have begun to do, HBW is fully prepared to meet the challenges presented by the global study of African American literature.

HBW STAFF 2012-2014

Maryemma Graham, Founder/Director Crystal Boson, Volunteer, 2012-2014 Crystal Bradshaw, Communications, Board Liaison, 2014-current Kristin Coffey, Special Pojects, 2012-current Will Cunningham IV, Black Book Pilot Project, Photographer, 2013-current Alysha Griffin, Inventory Specialist, 2011-2013 Shayn Guillemette, 2012-2014 Brandon Hill, NEH Videographer, 2013 Jennifer Hurst, Inventory Assistant, 2012 Jameelah Jones, Office Assistant, 2013-2014 Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt, Grants Coordinator and Special Projects, 2003-2007, 2009-current Lynne Lipsey, Webmaster/Consultant, 2008-current Lacey McAfee, Communications, 2010-2014 Jackie Monroe, Volunteer, 2012-2013 Justin Pavel, Office Assistant, 2010-2012 Felipe Peña, Office Assistant, 2012-2013 Kenton Rambsy, PDI Coordinator and Office Manager, 2010-2014 Simone Savannah, Special Projects, 2012-current Jaime Whitt, Publications Coordinator, Board Liaison, Grants Assistant, 2001-2003, 2011-2013 Meredith Wiggins, PDI Coordinator, Office Manager, 2014-current Goyland Williams, PDI Assistant, NEH Institute Staff, 2012-2014



2012-2013 HBW Staff. L to R (standing): Felipe Peña, Kenton Rambsy, Lacey McAfee, Jaime Whitt, Goyland Williams, Alysha Griffin, (seated) Simone Savannah, Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt, Maryemma Graham, Jackie Monroe



2013-2014 HBW Staff. L to R: Kenton Rambsy, Jaime Whitt, Goyland Williams, Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt, Shayne Guillemette, Brandon Hill (DDMV Videographer), Kristin Coffey, Will Cunningham, Jameelah Jones, Lacey McAfee

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Project on the History of Black Writing

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