



Project on the History of Black Writing

**REPORT: SPECIAL
35TH ANNIVERSARY
EDITION**

2015-2017
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas

The Project on the History of Black Writing, founded in 1983 at the University of Mississippi, Oxford, at University of Kansas since 1998, has promoted research and inclusion in higher education for 35 years. Guided by a collaborative work model, HBW is best known for literary recovery and preservation; digital scholarship and access; professional development and curriculum innovation; and public humanities programming. The project staff is composed entirely of undergraduate and graduate students.



Project Founder and Director
Maryemma Graham,
University Distinguished
Professor, English



Project Coordinator
Jennifer M. Wilmot
Ph.D. Student, Department
of Educational Leadership
and Policy Studies

ADVISORY BOARD

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2016 Staff & Affiliates – L to R – Anthony Boynton, Maryemma Graham, Wei Wang, Danny Caine, Alysha Griffin, Arnab Chakraborty, Matthew Broussard, Connor Noteboom, Crystal Bradshaw, Jennifer Wilmot, Mona Ahmed, William Cunningham, Hui Meng



W.W.(HBW).D? That is, **What Would the Project on the History of Black Writing (HBW) Do?** It's one of the questions I posed three years ago here at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, shortly after we hired a new junior faculty member who would cover African American literature courses along with another junior colleague and me. For the first time, our department was employing three specialists in African American literary studies all at the same time. We could, as we were being employed to do, merely teach our assigned courses. Or, we could cover the courses *and* also take some ideas from Maryemma Graham's HBW playbook, which would empower us to move in some additional directions.

And who better to borrow from that playbook than me? After all, I have been contributing to HBW projects for over a decade now, and during that time, I have studied and posed countless questions about the workings of HBW to Graham, her long-time and trusted Grants Coordinator Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt, and the many professors and graduate students who collaborated on projects over the years. Indeed, an HBW way of being in the world had already been thoroughly integrated into my thinking and practices by the summer of 2014, when I began plotting my next series of moves.

Shortly after my newest colleague arrived, I convinced her and my other colleague to participate in weekly sessions focused on African American literary studies. Soon after we began meeting, the humanities librarian at our university heard about our sessions and asked to join us. Sure, of course. Since that time, each week for the last two academic years, our small collective has met to discuss African American literary studies, prepare internal and external grants, establish a dataset on the histories of black literary scholarship, organize public humanities activities, and brainstorm new projects. Our first co-written article "Building an African American Literary Studies Dataset" appeared in *CLA Journal* last fall, and just as important, grants that we secured made it possible for us to coordinate "language and leadership" conferences for area secondary school students as well as online reading programs for college students.

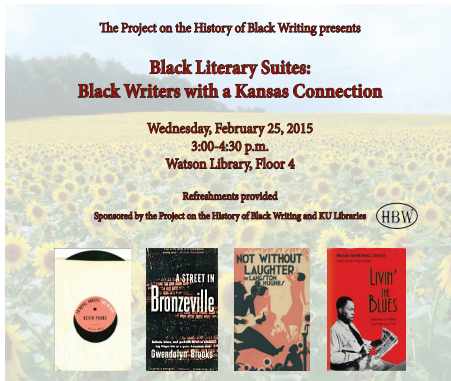
Why the public programs for secondary school and college students? That's easy: such projects are from the HBW playbook. Why a dataset on the histories of black literary scholarship? It complements an ongoing project on the history of black writing. Why all the grants? Because that's what HBW does. Why publish in *CLA Journal*? HBW has a longstanding commitment to the College Language Association, which produces the journal. Why the devotion to collaborative efforts and the weekly sessions to discuss African American literary studies and new projects? Well, HBW has been having a lively conversation about such matters for more than 30 years now, and we wanted to follow a wonderful, effective model.

Howard Ramsby II
HBW Advisory Board [Member since 2008]
Professor
Department of English, Language and Literature
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

FROM THE HBW PLAYBOOK

BLACK LITERARY SUITE: TAKING RESEARCH TO THE PUBLIC

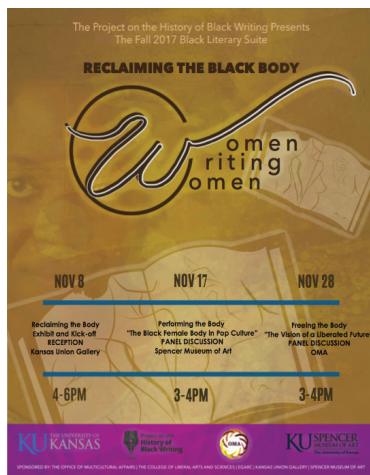
Since its inception in 2010, BLS has evolved into a multi-platform program with a themed exhibit, panels and discussions, films, and twitter chats. The goal is to bring increased public attention to lesser known aspects of literary history and culture. BLS exhibits can be viewed online: hbw.ku.edu/black-literary-suite



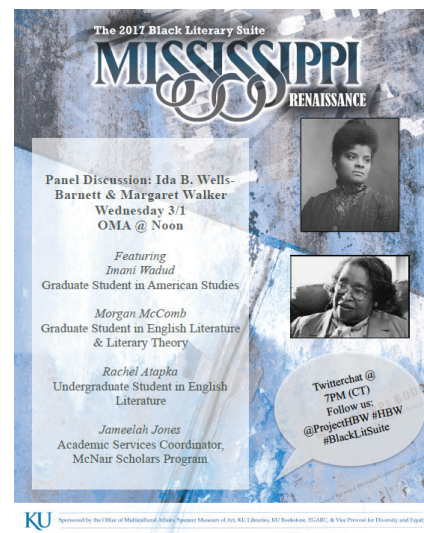
BLS Spring 2015 “Black Writers with a Kansas Connection”



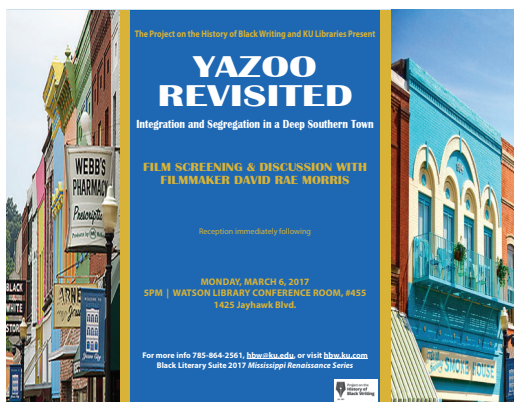
BLS 2016 “Sports Figures with a Kansas Connection”



BLS Fall 2017 “Reclaiming the Black Body: Women Writing Women”



BLS Spring 2017 “Mississippi Renaissance”



BLS Spring 2017 KU premier of film *Yazoo Revisited*. David Rae Morris, Director.



BLS 2017 Co-Coordinator Morgan McComb (podium) and Anthony Boynton (left rear)

BLACK BOOK INTERACTIVE PROJECT (BBIP): DIVERSIFYING THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

An NEH-start up grant, BBIP is developing a vocabulary for structuring texts—a metadata schema—that responds to the cultural and racial complexities within African American literature. A partnership with the University of Chicago’s Chicago Text Lab enabled the conversion of our African American Novel Collection to a digital file, which is also included in the American Novel Database Project. HBW initiated Digital Inclusion Network (DIGIN) to address the digital divide by identifying hidden collections and promoting digital literacy training inside and outside the academy. BBIP’s goal is to also analyze the durability, efficacy and relevance of existing digital tools for deepening our understanding of the significance of African American cultural heritage materials. Given ongoing and primary concern for recovering black writing, we run the risk of finding texts, only to have them disappear all over again because we don’t have working models that employ contemporary approaches, including data mining and visualization, for creating new knowledge.



KU scanning team, Dominique Waller, Connor Noteboom (team leader), Mona Ahmed



KU Scanning Team

Over a two year period, student teams at the University of Chicago and KU completed the scanning of nearly 1000 mostly underdiscussed novels by black writers. A second phase of the project has already begun to secure funding to (1) add additional content to the existing digital archive and complete the conversion to machine readable files enriched by descriptive metadata; (2) adopt and test a user interface developed by the UC team to enable greater access and discoverability; and (3) provide a series of intensive workshops to make BBIP available to a larger group of scholars, educators, and students currently outside of the digital community.



The BBIP scanning team at the University of Chicago (left to right): Dake Kang, Mahmoud Aliamer, Simone Oliver, and Athena Kern - June 2016

COLLEGE LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION: PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION

2015 “Expanding Frontiers:
Freedom, Resistance, and
Transnational Identities in
Languages and Literatures”

“Writing and Reading Be-
yond the Boundaries: CLA’s
Next Generation”



CLA 2015 – New Scholars Panelists

2016 “Dialogues Between Africa
and the African Diaspora in
Languages, Literatures and
Films”

“Reading & Writing the
African/Diaspora: Africa and
the Caribbean”

“What’s Race Got to Do with It? – Then and Now”

2017 “Agency, Artistry and Ambivalence in Black Literature and Expressive Culture: A Reading of Charles Chesnutt, the Harlem Renaissance and Beyoncé”

“The Eugene Redmond Effect: New Drum Voices” (Creative Writing Undergraduate Panel)



CLA 2016 – Maryemma Graham is awarded the CLA Lifetime Achievement Award



CLA 2017 – CLA banquet speaker Jamaica Kincaid with New Drum Voices panelists: Rachel Atakpa, Margarita Nuñez Arroyo, Shih Yen Pan, Crystal Bradshaw

BLACK POETRY AFTER THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT NEH SUMMER INSTITUTE: SCHOLARLY ENGAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

July 2015

- 40+ scholars identified trends and practices that derive from the Black Arts tradition
- 25 NEH Summer Scholars selected to participate
- “Poetry and Its Futures” panel forecast probable trajectories for poetry in the 21st century
- Public poetry readings by Kevin Young, Evie Shockley, William J. Harris, Harryette Mullen and Meta DuEwa Jones
- Documentary *BaddDDD* Sonia Sanchez (2015)
- Post-institute public webinars with a variety of inter-generational poets <http://blackpoetry.ku.edu>



Evie Shockley reading at the Raven Bookstore, Lawrence



NEH Summer Scholars with Institute staff and Visiting Scholars. First row: Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt (institute coordinator), Meta DuEwa Jones; M. Graham, Evie Shockley, Keith Leonard, Kristin Lockridge Coffey (assistant coordinator)

BEIJING FOREIGN STUDIES UNIVERSITY (BFSU): INTERNATIONALIZING OUR WORK

Beginning in 2016, HBW hosted the annual KU-BFSU Summer Institute designed to provide an introduction to American higher education and America's culturally diverse heritage. A partnership between KU and BFSU will allow this program to continue for at least 5 years.

July 2016 and July 2017

- BFSU graduate and undergraduate students, faculty and administrators
- Academic lectures in the disciplines of English Literature, American Studies, Business, African/African-American Studies and History
- Graduate Student Panel where KU students shared their experiences
- Sunday service at St. Luke African Methodist Episcopal Church
- Lawrence/Langston Hughes city tour with local historian
- Haskell (University) Cultural Center and Museum
- Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and Spencer Museum of Art
- Lawrence Farmer's Market
- Campus and community music and theater events
- Multiple dinners and receptions with KU faculty, graduate students and administrators



BFSU 2016 with KU Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little. Dr. Frank Cai, faculty leader (left). Institute Staff: Sarah Arbuthnot-Lendt (3rd from left back row), Graham, (3rd from right, back row), Hui Meng (2nd from right, back row)

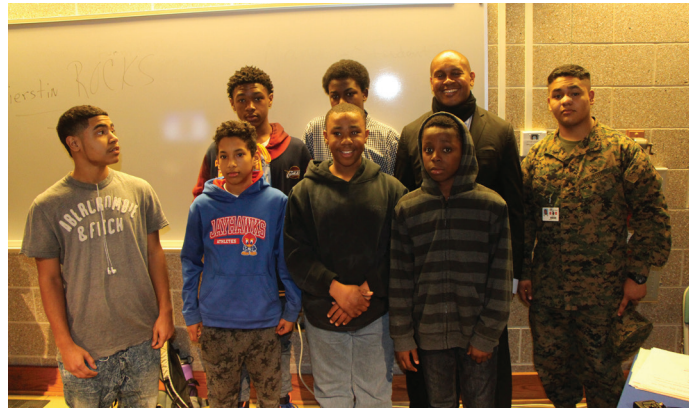
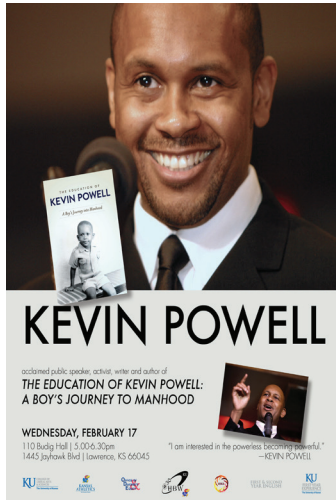
The KU-BFSU Summer Institute was self-funded by BFSU. Support for hospitality was provided by various KU entities.



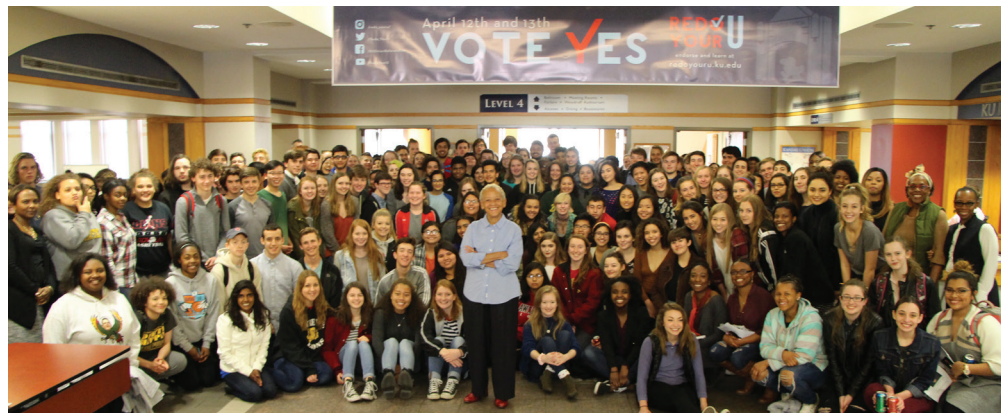
BFSU 2017 with HBW staff, students from Marla's Textile Academy, and artist **Faith Ringgold**. The first national African American Quilt Convention was organized and hosted by the African American Quilt Museum and Textile Academy, Inc., Lawrence, KS.

CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

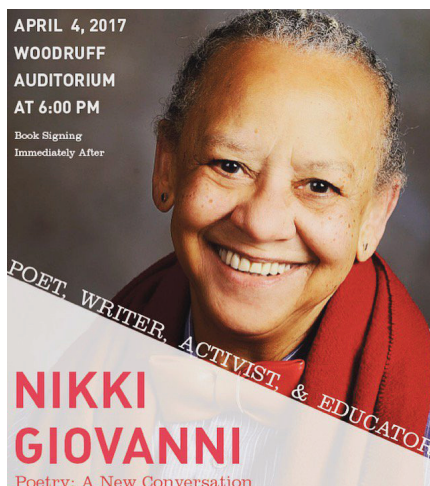
Funds permitting, HBW invites major artists and speakers to campus for a short residency, which includes a major lecture, workshops and visits to classes. We routinely provide support for other campus and community-sponsored conferences and events.



Topeka high school students meet with Kevin Powell, 2016



Nikki Giovanni, 2017, co-sponsored by the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Students from KU, Lawrence High School, and Free State High School



Jayhawk Reunion at College Language Association, 2017, Columbia, Missouri. Rear: Ayesha Hardison, Jennifer Wilmot, Doug Stewart, Shih Yen Pan, Anthony Boynton, Maryemma Graham, Damaris Hill. Front: Crystal Bradshaw, Margarita Nuñez Arroyo, Rachel Atakpa



The African American Quilt Museum and Textile Academy held the first annual National African American Quilt Convention on July 12-15, 2017 in Lawrence, KS. Organized by artist Marla Jackson, the event drew a multitude of textile artists from across the country, sponsored workshops on fabric arts (including quilting and knitting) and held historic tours of Lawrence. Internationally renowned artist and quilter Faith Ringgold, gave the opening keynote address.



The Black Love Symposium held September 11-18, 2017, celebrating the 80th anniversary of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, included the "Soul of Zora" exhibit, featuring the work of local quilters; and a marathon reading of the novel around town.



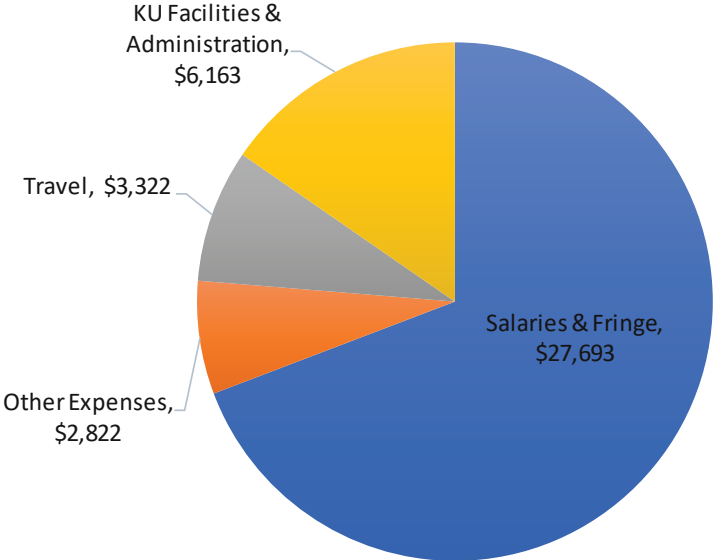
Diverse Academic Careers Workshop for CLAS graduate students at the Hall Center September 15, 2017 as part of KU's Black Love Symposium. Participants (left to right) 1st row: Igor Ristic, N.Y. Nathiri, Maryemma Graham, Morgan McComb, 2nd row: Simone Savannah, Ogochukwu Ngwudike, Sarah Polo, Stefanie Torres-Maksimowicz, Casey Keel, 3rd row: Shelia Bonner, Mercedes Lucero, Kate Nygren, Leighann Dicks, Christopher Peace, Giselle Anatol with N.Y. Nathiri, Executive Director, Association for the Preservation of the Eatonville Community.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Funding	2015	2016	2017
University of Kansas	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000
Summer Salary Funds ¹	\$-	\$2,000	\$17,493
TOTAL ²	\$25,000	\$27,000	\$42,493

Funds are spent on student salaries; travel; fees; hospitality; postage; printing and advertising; and contracts and services.

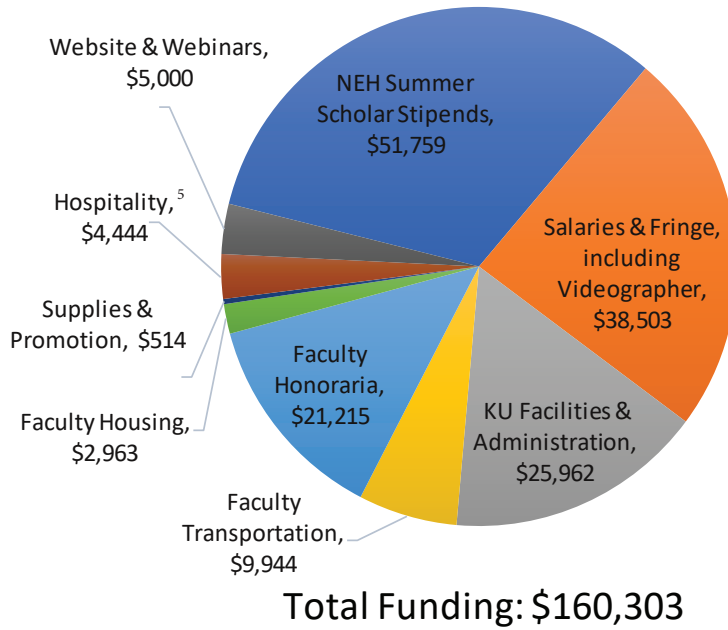
Black Book Interactive Project ³



Total Grant Funding: \$40,000

1. Maryemma Graham reserves a portion of her annual salary to fund HBW work during the summer months.
 2. HBW also has an endowment supported by the Advisory Board. The average balance for fiscal years 2015-2017 was \$8,887.
 3. Project Dates 4/1/16 to 2/28/18

Black Poetry after the Black Arts Movement ⁴



4. Project Dates 10/1/14 to 2/29/16

5. NEH generally does not permit grant funds be spent on food, drink or hospitality (one working lunch allowed). \$3,900 in combined funds were contributed by various KU entities to provide several group meals and daily coffee service.

STAFF 2017-2018

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Hui Xu, Visiting Scholar, kathyxh@ku.edu

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.

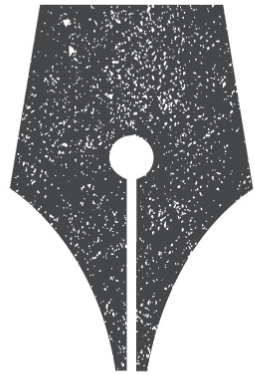
MISSION

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



Project on the **History of Black Writing**

Est. 1983

Project on the History of Black Writing

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University of Kansas/English Dept.

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www.projecthbw.ku.edu

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