ACTIVITY REPORT

HISTORY OF BLACK WRITING
THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

JULY 2018 - DECEMBER 2021
The History of Black Writing (HBW), founded in 1983 at the University of Mississippi and located at the University of Kansas since 1998, has promoted research and inclusion in higher education for nearly 40 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 primarily of undergraduate and graduate students with one full-time staff member, all led by a faculty director.

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From the Director

As the new director of the History of Black Writing, I am delighted to introduce the many programs and accomplishments the project has implemented and achieved in the past three-and-a-half years. During this time and under Dr. Maryemma Graham’s dedicated direction, HBW has grown exponentially in terms of both human resources and external funding. I am enjoying working with Maryemma as she phases into retirement. As you can imagine, I have learned much from her knowledge, experience, and leadership. I am honored to continue the legacy she has built with HBW.

While I have served as the University of Kansas representative to HBW’s Advisory Board since 2016 (which is just one year short of my time at KU), my extensive work with the project truly began this past summer when I co-directed the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Summer Institute Hurston on the Horizon: Past, Present, and Future with Maryemma. Our July convening with 25 Institute participants entailed three weeks committed to intensive study, which covered everything Hurston, from her classic novels and ethnographies to her lesser-known plays and film work. We also continued our collaborative engagement into the fall semester with three webinars featuring the late Hurston biographer Valerie Boyd, writer Tayari Jones, and philosophy scholar Dr. Lindsey Stewart. At that time we did not know how very fortunate we were to have Valerie Boyd share with us her research journey with Hurston, an affinity she viewed as a higher calling, before her passing on February 12, 2022. We are grateful to have recorded her conversation with fellow Hurston scholar Dr. John Lowe so that people can continue to learn about Hurston as well as Valerie’s critical contribution to a wider appreciation of Hurston’s immense enrichment of American letters: https://mediahub.ku.edu/media/t/1_q34jtfrh.

In January 2022, HBW concluded Hurston on the Horizon with a mini conference attended by Institute participants and invited speakers Dr. Irma McClaurin, Dr. Marcus L. Harvey, and artist/curator Candice Hoyes. We also debuted HBW’s interview with fiber artist Marla Jackson: https://mediahub.ku.edu/media/t/1_pucmqn0q.

Now entering its 39th year of recovery work, preservation, and public humanities, HBW continues to support talented graduate and undergraduate students, provide professional development opportunities for faculty, and plan programs to promote and critically engage Black writers.
As NEH Institute participants have planned panels for two academic conferences this year, I look forward to discovering how Hurston on the Horizon shapes the new wave of Hurston studies with generative scholarship and teaching. Whereas the Institute and its related programming exemplify the various ways HBW connects with scholars, students, and broad audiences, they are only a few of the ways HBW attempts to honor Black writers and, in turn, readers and scholars of the tradition.

Within these pages you will learn more about the programs HBW continues to deliver as we promote the recovery and widespread access to African American literature, including the Black Book Interactive Project (BBIP), Black Literary Suite (BLS), and Gems. You will also learn about our inter-institutional partnerships, including working relationships with Dr. Howard Rambsy, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville; Dr. Kenton Rambsy, University of Texas Arlington; the Textual Optics Lab, University of Chicago; HathiTrust Research Center; and the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture. You will also discover some of our new initiatives, such as the Black Books Network, internships, and fundraising campaigns, to support and facilitate students’ academic learning, research training, and professional development. I hope you will feel and sense HBW’s steady momentum-building for growth and innovation, which is not only demonstrated in the expansion of our staff from 8 to 22 graduate and undergraduate students, who bring new ideas and talents to the project, but is also signaled in our refocused name, new branding, and forthcoming renovated website.

HBW is presently in transition—in all the exciting ways transformation promises. We are cataloging our own history, reviewing our infrastructure and practices, and envisioning future directions with intention. We remain committed to HBW’s longstanding mission and principles. We remain inspired by our aim to be at the forefront of higher education’s research and inclusion efforts since HBW’s founding at the University of Mississippi in 1983. I seek your ideas and support in this undertaking. Moreover, I hope you will accompany us as we forge HBW’s next steps in celebrating 40 years of literary preservation, public programming, and community building as well as in planning for the decades to come.

— Dr. Ayesha Hardison, Associate Professor of English and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Director, History of Black Writing

From the Director, cont.

Numbers at a Glance: July 2018-Dec. 2021

- $1.3 Million Awarded in External Grants
- 5 Federal and Foundation Grants
- 9 Public Events
- 1 Summer Institute
- 3 Black Literary Suite Exhibits
- 1 Gems Initiative Video
- 22 Student Employees
- 175% Student Employment Increase
- 4,000+ Books in Corpus
- 900 Digitized Texts accessible via PhiloLogic
- 1,500+ Texts identified
- 76 Blog Entries
- 9 Presentations, Panels, and Publications
- 22 Institutional Partnerships
- 767 Newsletter Subscribers
- $25,000+ in Internal Fundraising to support Amandla Excellence Endowment
- 3,629 Social Media followers combined
Hurston on the Horizon: Past, Present, and Future
focused on Zora Neale Hurston's impact on American literature and culture as an author, anthropologist, journalist, filmmaker, and precursor to the applied humanities. It invited 25 participants to deepen their appreciation of this prolific writer and foster new directions for teaching and research.

- Three-week virtual summer Institute.
- Leading scholars served as faculty and provided asynchronous lectures and synchronous discussions.
- Scholar-participants engaged in intensive study, rigorous discussion and collaborative work.
- Series of public post-Institute webinars with top Hurston scholars provided outreach to a broader audience.
- Virtual mini-conference January 28-29, 2022 reconvened the Institute participants to present on their work and featured a keynote address and artist interviews.

Links
- Schedule (https://hurston.ku.edu/schedule)
- Faculty (https://hurston.ku.edu/faculty)
- Scholars (https://hurston.ku.edu/neh-summer-scholars)
- Public Webinars (https://hurston.ku.edu/news/webinars)
- The Keynote Address (https://mediahub.ku.edu/media/t/1_9cs645ke)
- Artist Interviews (https://mediahub.ku.edu/media/t/1_pucmqn0q)

The Black Books Network is a new digital initiative that will house HBW’s expanding Novel Corpus (6,000+ titles) and create web resources that derive from and function in relationship to the Corpus:

Black Literature Network:
- The Novel Generator Machine – a virtual assistant providing book recommendations for user queries.
- The Literary Data Gallery – a collection of data visualizations derived from quantitative information about African American fiction.
- The Multithreaded Literary Briefs – a webpage that presents keywords and topics about Black fiction produced by participating scholars of literature.
- The Remarkable Receptions podcast – a series of audio narratives concentrating on popular and critical responses to prominent African American writers.

B² Digital:
- An online platform to house HBW’s expanding digital inventory and provide a repository for completed and in process digital publishing projects as well as DH training webinars and resources.

Funded by the Mellon Foundation and an NEH Digital Humanities Advancement Grant, the Black Books Network builds upon models developed by project partners Howard Rambsy, Kenton Rambsy, and the IRIS Center at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. An additional project component is the Data Rangers Fellowship, a series of virtual workshops that equips undergraduates and graduate students with digital skills applicable across a range of disciplines, including: building websites, formatting media, and creating online exhibits.

Additional project partners include: Drew Davidson, KU’s Information and Telecommunication Technology Center (ITTC), Afro Publishing Without Walls 2 (AFRO-PWW 2) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Marilyn Thomas-Houston; with special contributions by Hannah Park.
The Black Book Interactive Project (BBIP) is an ongoing, multi-phase project that fills a notable void in the digital landscape as the largest database of African American novels, the HBW Novel Corpus, and its creation of a metadata schema that specifically accounts for race.

The Black Book Interactive Project - Extending the Reach (BBIP-ER, 2018-2020), sought to expand the HBW Novel Corpus in terms of the number of novels and also widen our network of users. We met and/or exceeded our grant benchmarks:

- 900 texts digitized and uploaded to the PhiloLogic user interface, and 1,500+ new texts identified
- Hosted a metadata workshop at KU with DH scholar Julian Chambliss in October 2019

The Black Book Interactive Project III (2021-2023) is the next phase of BBIP, and continues where BBIP-ER left off in the creation of the HBW Novel Corpus, by expanding the network of digital humanities scholars working with our collection.

Deliverables:
- 2,100 texts to be digitized and uploaded to the PhiloLogic user interface.

The Black Book Interactive Project – Extending the Reach (BBIP-ER, 2018-2020)

Activites, cont.
Since 2011, HBW’s annual Black Literary Suites exhibit has the goal of educating a public audience on lesser-known figures in Black literature and the arts. This project also serves as an opportunity for members of the HBW student-staff to learn and refine their research skills through the planning and execution of the exhibit and accompanying program. After the public exhibit, the BLS is archived in KU’s Digital Repository KU ScholarWorks.

- 2018 “Reclaiming the Black Body: Women Writing Women”
- 2019 “Researching While Black”
- 2020 “Black Writing in Reel Time”
- 2022 “Afro-Latinx Writers” currently in process
Activities, cont.

Zora! Festival Internship
This annual January festival, which is held in honor of author Zora Neale Hurston and is hosted by the Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community in her hometown of Eatonville, FL, includes academic conferences, exhibitions and cultural events. HBW has sponsored a student intern to support this event in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Links
• ZORA! Festival Season (https://zorafestival.org/)

Gems
In 2012, HBW launched its Gems media initiative to promote rigorous scholarship and to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of “forgotten” or “less-than-well-known” African American writers. To date, our four Gems video presentations bring these writers’ lives and works to the foreground of discussion and remind us that recovery efforts are always ongoing.

Links
• 2019: Naomi Long Madgett: Poet, Editor and Educator (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yK-hnyw1GQ)

Blog
Launched in 2011, HBW’s blog celebrated 10 years of digital publishing in 2021. Guest contributors to the blog include leading scholars and writers, but the majority of the posts are conceived of, researched and written by undergraduate and graduate students. Its content includes book reviews, memorials, and coverage of HBW programming.

Number of blog entries published:
• 2018 (July-Dec): 27
• 2019: 26
• 2020: 23

Links
@ProjectHBW on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram
• https://twitter.com/projecthbw/ 
• https://www.facebook.com/projecthbw/ 
• https://www.instagram.com/projecthbw/

Newsletter
Conceived of as a way to highlight blog content and provide updates on current projects, the HBW Newsletter published four issues each in 2019 and 2020. HBW staff plans to revive the newsletter in 2022 with a new format, look and focus on project updates.

• Subscribers: 777

Social Media
HBW’s social media serves as the bridge between our academic research and a broader audience. Our social media gives us the ability to share the work we do by utilizing digital tools and platforms. We also regularly share and promote information about Black writing from other organizers and users in our effort to expand the visibility of Black writing. As of January 2022, HBW’s social media engagement is as follows:

• Twitter: 1,198 followers 
• Facebook: 1,945 followers; 1,874 page likes
• Instagram: 486 followers

Links
• The Project on the History of Black Writing June 2020 Newsletter
• The Project on the History of Black Writing April 2020 Newsletter
• The Project on the History of Black Writing February 2020 Newsletter
• The Project on the History of Black Writing January 2020 Newsletter
• The Project on the History of Black Writing December 2019 Newsletter, Edition #1
• The Project on the History of Black Writing December 2019 Newsletter, Edition #2
• The Project on the History of Black Writing October 2019 Newsletter, Edition #2
• The Project on the History of Black Writing Inaugural Newsletter September 2019
Special Events: Outreach and Public Programming

A Bound Woman is a Dangerous Thing – Reading and Book Signing and Writers Workshop with DaMaris Hill, March 23-24, 2019.

HBW hosted author, scholar, and HBW alum DaMaris Hill for a public reading and book signing for her poetry collection A Bound Woman is a Dangerous Thing. Hill also conducted a writers workshop at the Lawrence (Kansas) Public Library that was free and open to the public.

Jennifer Wilmot (Criminalizing Girlhood Project, Kansas), as well as a quilt exhibit by Maria Jackson.

Black Boy @ 75 Webinar April 23, 2020.

Marking the 75th anniversary publication of Richard Wright’s autobiography Black Boy, scholar Howard Rambsy presented a webinar examining the ways that publishers sought to represent Wright’s book to readers in ways that situate the book in different historical and aesthetic contexts.


HBW hosted a Symposium on Mass Incarceration at the Lawrence (Kansas) Public Library. Speakers included Patrick Alexander (Prison-to-College Pipeline Program, Mississippi); Jerry W. Ward (New Orleans Justice Center, Louisiana); Brian Daldorph (Douglas County Jail, Kansas); and Jennifer Wilmot (Criminalizing Girlhood Project, Kansas), as well as a quilt exhibit by Maria Jackson.

Links
- Dr. Howard Rambsy II Webinar on Wright’s Black Boy [http://mediashub.ku.edu/media/1_zxe0zst9]

Presentations, Panels, and Publications


The Project on the History of Black Writing (PHBW) Special Session on Reading and Teaching Narratives, College Language Association Convention, April 2019.

Chair: Maryemma Graham, The University of Kansas

“Senior Readers and African American Narratives” Jerry W. Ward, Jr., Independent Scholar

“A Race in My Arms: Ida B. Wells, Autobiography, and the Problem of Reconstruction” Stefan Wheelock, George Mason University

“Frederick Douglass and African American Book History” Howard Rambsy II, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
“Narrating Black Womanhood in Poetry, Fiction and Film.” College Language Association Convention, April 2019.

Chair: Ayesha Hardison, University of Kansas

“Did Frederick Douglass’s mother/brush his hair in the morning?: Innovative Black Poetics and Black Womanhood in Contemporary Black Poetry”
Morgan McComb, University of Kansas

“Biracial Identity in Contemporary Film: Angie Thomas’s The Hate U Give”
Mona Ahmed, University of Kansas

“Embodiment, Textuality, and Performativity in Southern Women’s Fiction”
Alysha Griffin, University of Kansas


Presentations, Panels, and Publications, cont.
Financial Report

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July 2018-June 2019

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FISCAL YEAR JULY 2020
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University of Kansas, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, annual funding to support student salaries, outreach and public programs, and travel, $25,000 (Ongoing).

KUEA (Endowment Association) Current Balances
- History of Black Writing Development, $23,525
- Amandla Excellence Fund, $49,878

Funding
- 2020, $7,295 (toward the Amandla Excellence Fund)
- 2021, $8,865 (toward the Amandla Excellence Fund)

Grant Funding
American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), “Black Book Interactive Project: Extending the Reach,” $150,000 (7/1/2018-9/30/2020), PI Maryemma Graham

Hall Center for the Humanities, University of Kansas, Supplementary Funding to support the Black Book Interactive Project, $500 (10/2020), PI Maryemma Graham


Mellon Foundation, “The Black Literature Network: Building Knowledge through a Digital Media Atmosphere,” $900,000 (10/1/2021-12/31/2024), PI Maryemma Graham, Co-Pi Howard Rambsy, Drew Davidson, and Kenton Rambsy

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), “Building Literacy and Curating (Critical Cultural) Knowledge in Digital Humanities (BLACK DH),” $325,000 (1/1/2022-12/31/2024), PI Maryemma Graham and Co-Pi Marilyn Thomas-Houston

National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), “Hurston on the Horizon: Past, Present, and Future” Summer Institute, $200,000 (10/1/2020 - 6/30/2022), PI Ayesha Hardison and Co-PI Maryemma Graham

Grants, Endowments, and Funding

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Hall Center for the Humanities, University of Kansas, Supplementary Funding to support the Black Book Interactive Project, $500 (10/2020), PI Maryemma Graham

Mellon Foundation, “Stories for All: A Digital Storytelling Project for the Twenty-First Century,” $20,000 (9/1/2021-6/30/2022), Hall Center for the Humanities and the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities, PI Richard Goodbeer with Co-Pis Nijarian Peters, Sylvia Fernández, Ayesha Hardison, Nishani Frazier, Ignacio Carvajal, and Kent Blansett

Mellon Foundation, “The Black Literature Network: Building Knowledge through a Digital Media Atmosphere,” $900,000 (10/1/2021-12/31/2024), PI Maryemma Graham, Co-Pi Howard Rambsy, Drew Davidson, and Kenton Rambsy

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1 Hurston on the Horizon funding dates were 10/2020-6/2022 with the bulk of the work completed and funds expended during the Summer Institute in July 2022 (outside the dates of this report).
2021: 23 Years at the University of Kansas

- Over $3 Million for Research and Programming (excluding fellowships and charitable contributions)
- Over $200,000 from University of Kansas Grant competitions

- Project on the History of Black Writing
  - 15 PhDs, MAs, and JDs
  - 35 BAs
  - 7 Fulbright Scholars & Post-Docs
  - 2016-Present Black Book Interactive Project (BBIP)

- 1999-2009 Annual Oral History Workshops, Hall Center for the Humanities
- 2004-2010 Language Matters Teaching Initiative, Partnership with the Toni Morrison Society
- 2016-2017 KU-Beijing Foreign Studies University Institutes

- NEH Institutes and Public Programs, 2002-2022
- Black Literary Suite Exhibits
- Gems Initiative Videos

- 38 Years of Operation
- 10 Years of the HBW Blog
- 750+ blog entries published

Institutional Partners, July 2018-Dec. 2021

- Afro-PWW (Publishing Without Walls)
- American Council of Learned Societies
- Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community
- College Language Association
- English Department, KU
- Ermal Garinger Academic Resource Center, KU
- Hall Center for the Humanities, KU
- HathiTrust Research Center
- HBCU Library Alliance
- Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities, KU
- KU Endowment Association
- KU Libraries
- KU Union Galleries
- Mellon Foundation
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- Office of the Chancellor, KU
- Office of the Provost, KU
- National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution
- Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville
- Spencer Museum of Art, KU
- Spencer Research Library, KU
- Textual Optics Lab, University of Chicago
- University of Texas at Arlington
- Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department, KU
Current HBW Staff, 2021-2022

Ayesha Hardison, Director
Maryemma Graham, Founding Director
Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt, Research Project Manager
Storm Alicie, Social Media, undergraduate Human Services and Education double major, Emerging Scholar
Amy Billings, Black Books Network, English PhD student
Robert Cajas, BBIP, undergraduate Anthropology and Latin American & Caribbean Studies double major, accelerated masters in Latin American Studies
Ross Copeland, Black Books Network, undergraduate Computer Science major
Petre Dimitriu, BBIP, undergraduate English major
Ka’i Hansen, HBW Archive and Social Media, undergraduate English and Biology double major
Jade Harrison, BBIP Coordinator and Hurston on the Horizon, English PhD student
Mahala Higginbotham, BBIP, undergraduate English major
Sandra Jacobo, BLS Coordinator, English PhD student
Amar Kamalulrahim, BLS, undergraduate Finance and International Business double major, Emerging Scholar
Venkat Karasani, Black Books Network, Computer Science MS student
Onat Kolcu, BBIP, Political Science PhD student
David Miller, Design, English PhD student
Erin Murray, BLACK DH, Counseling Psychology PhD student
Christopher Peace, Hurston on the Horizon, English PhD student
Meleah Perez, “Introduction to Digital Humanities” BBIP Scholars Program Coordinator and HBW Office Coordinator, poetry MFA student
Alejandro Rangel-Lopez, BBIP, undergraduate Political Science and Public Administration double major
Ashley Simmons, HBW Archive Coordinator, English PhD student
Ryan Skrabalak, BBIP, poetry MFA student
Victoria Garcia Unzueta, Social Media Coordinator, undergraduate Strategic Communications major
Lucy Whittington, HBW Archive, undergraduate English major
Brendan Williams-Childs, BBIP Coordinator, fiction MFA student

HBW Staff, 2018-2021

Maryemma Graham, Director
Sarah Arbuthnot Lendt, Research Project Manager
Mona Ahmed
Anthony Boynton
Ama Chakraborty
Kynadl Delph
Danyelle Greene
Alysha Griff
Ka’i Hansen
Jade Harrison
Grace Higginbotham
Sandra Jacobo
Jane’A Johnson
Andi Kerbs
Morgan McComb
Connor Noteboom
Vince Omri
DeAsia Paige
Christopher Peace
Meleah Perez
Alejandro Rangel-Lopez
Hamza Rehman
Ellee Rogers
Simone Savannah
Ashley Simmons
Victoria Garcia Unzueta
Nyla Wansley
Robbin Williams
Brendan Williams-Childs
Jennifer Wilmot
Acknowledgements

Jenny Mehmedovic, Office of the Provost
Pam LeRow, Digital Media Services
Emily Bittiger, English
Kasie Conrad, English
Lori W Hitten, English
Daniel Brown, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Anne Thuro, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Mark Reynolds, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Simon Atkinson, KU Center for Research
Brett Bass, KU Center for Research
Stephanie Phan, KU Center for Research
Tina Roberts, KU Center for Research
Richard Godbeer, Hall Center for the Humanities
Kathy Porsche, Hall Center for the Humanities
Dave Byrd-Stadler, KU Endowment Association
Don Allmon, Information Technology
Joel Sanderson, Information Technology
Rick H allman, KU News Service
Eric Bader, Digital Media Services
Danielle Duer, Shared Service Center
Carley Fannin, Shared Service Center
Matthew Farrier, Shared Service Center
Susan Franks, Shared Service Center
Beth Hoffmann, Shared Service Center
Mindy Russell, Shared Service Center
Cathy Swenson-Tucker, Shared Service Center
Jon Perkins, EGARC
Keh Cunningham, EGARC
Marianne Reed, KU Libraries
Kev in Smith, KU Libraries
Erin Wolfe, KU Libraries
Brian Rosenblum, Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities
Elspeth Haleley, Spencer Research Library
Deborah Dandridge, Spencer Research Library

Website and Contact Information

Active Websites
History of Black Writing
http://hbw.ku.edu
Black Book Interactive Project
http://bbip.ku.edu
Hurston on the Horizon (2021 NEH Summer Institute for College Faculty)
http://hurston.ku.edu

Website Archives
Language Matters
http://www2.ku.edu/~langmtrs/

Language Matters II: Reading and Teaching Toni Morrison (2005 NEH Summer Institute for High School Teachers)
http://www2.ku.edu/~langmtrs/lmII/index.html
Making the Wright Connection (2010 NEH Summer Institute for High School Teachers)
http://wrightconnection.ku.edu/blog
Don't Deny My Voice: Reading and Teaching African American Poetry (2012 NEH Summer Institute for College Faculty)
http://dontdeny.ku.edu
Black Poetry After the Black Arts Movement (2015 NEH Summer Institute for College Faculty)
http://blackpoetry.ku.edu

HBW MAIN OFFICE
Wescoe Hall, Room 3114
1445 Jayhawk Blvd.
Lawrence, KS 66045

BBIP SATELLITE OFFICE
Watson Library, Room 352
1425 Jayhawk Blvd.
Lawrence, KS 66045

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