

*The Center for Black Literature serves to heighten the public's awareness and knowledge of black literature. Through conferences, symposia, workshops and readings the Center brings together writers and readers within Medgar Evers College and broader community.*

**Our First  
Issue**

## Letter from Executive Director

In a time when people are reading more than ever and when books written by black authors are on the rise, it is important to highlight the work of these writers and to provide support for emerging writers, young students, and the general public. It is also essential that writers practice their craft and that readers hold writers responsible for producing good texts. We accomplish this when we provide forums for looking at the composing and reading of black literature in critical ways.

Our first issue highlights several programs that we sponsored to help support teachers, emerging writers, and students writers in the reading and development of literary texts from the African Diaspora. In the summer of 2004, we sponsored a professional development workshop for high school teachers who immersed themselves in



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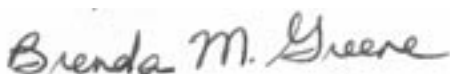
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the literary and historical culture of Brooklyn and we co-sponsored a writing institute and retreat for writers of color. Writers worked on their stories and poems in a secluded guest house in upstate New York, with three institute faculty and three workshop

leaders. One of the writers who participated in this workshop recently got a publishing contract. In the Fall 2004, we offered for the third year, a writers workshop for African American elders. This program has expanded and there are more elders telling their stories.

We hope to see these stories published in some format by the end of the year. Our spoken word course for high school students was also continued this year; once again, students demonstrated their tremendous talent in composing poems and hip hop lyrics. Lastly, our weekly radio program provided access for black writers and supports our mission of providing an ongoing forum for black writers to talk about their work.

Writing feeds the soul, inspires the imagination, and nurtures the spirit. Feed yourselves, keep reading and writing. Visit our website and support our programs. Keep on the lookout for several programs next semester, the Brother to Brother Literary Symposium, March 18-19, 2005, the Gwendolyn Brooks Symposium, April 8, 2005, and the North Country Institute and Retreat for Writers of Color, June 19-25, 2005.

  
Brenda M. Greene, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

## **Soul of Brooklyn: Brooklyn Teachers Adopt Innovative and Creative Techniques to Teach High School Students**

By Teneisha Griffin

*The Soul of Brooklyn*, a CUNY Arts Consortium Summer Project, was sponsored by The Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College. The purpose of this project was to assist high school teachers in Brooklyn with their use of cultural and historical sites in Brooklyn to enhance curriculum and classroom activities.

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*Ultimately, the goal of the project was to enable high school students to develop their writing, listening and comprehension skills, while giving them a sense of self importance and accomplishments by incorporating Brooklyn's culture.*

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accomplishments by incorporating Brooklyn's culture.

The workshop, *The Soul of Brooklyn*, took place at Medgar Evers College, CUNY. The workshops were three weeks long in the month of July. The facilitator of this workshop was Yaa Asantewa Nzinga, a performance artist and teacher. Since the purpose of the workshop was curriculum driven, teacher used a range of media, historical and literary texts to identify creative teaching strategies. In addition, Richard Green, a guest speaker, spoke about the history of Brooklyn. The teachers visited the Weeksville Historical Society and they learned about the significance of people of color in the Weeksville community. With this recognition, the teachers were able to relate the history of

Weeksville to their students. The teachers also visited the Brooklyn Historical Society where they learned about all kinds of people and their contributions to the borough of Brooklyn. There was also a trip to the African Burial Ground: a memorial for enslaved men, women and children. For the final project, the teachers visited the Rush Arts Gallery that featured the exhibit "It's Bigger than Hip- Hop" where they heard a lecture by Danny Simmons

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## **North Country Institute & Retreat for Writers of Color: Writers Teaching Writers**

By Teneisha Griffin

The Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College, The City University of New York, in collaboration with the English Department at SUNY Plattsburgh, and The Paden Institute & Retreat for Writers of Color, sponsored the First Annual North Country Poetry and Fiction Institute and Retreat for Writers of Color. The Center of Black Literature was awarded a grant from the Nathan Cummings Foundation to sponsor this event. This retreat took place at the Valcour Educational Conference Center which is located in the Adirondack and Lake Champlain regions of New York State. The North Country Institute and Retreat for Writers of Color was a week long retreat.

The goal of the North Country Institute and Retreat for writers of Color Poetry & Fiction Summer Institute was to target urban writers of color who would come and work on their writings with faculty mentors such as: poet and children's author, Sonia Sanchez; fiction writer, Indira Ganesan; poet, essayist, children's author, Tony Medina and workshop leaders such as: novelist and CUNY Distinguished Professor of Medgar Evers College, Elizabeth Nunez; mystery writer, Frankie Bailey and novelist, Wesley Brown. The participants in these workshops composed, read, performed and shared their writing at the retreat center. During the 2004-2005 academic years, writers will share their writing at various venues throughout New York

# Memories of Elder African-Americans

By Teneisha Griffin

The Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College, in collaboration with Siloam Presbyterian Church, is sponsoring a memoir workshop entitled *Tales of Our Times*. The workshop is conducted by Malaika Adero, an editor at Simon and Schuster, and editor of the acclaimed anthology, *Up South: Stories, Studies and Letters of This Century's Black Migration*. The memoir workshop is for African American seniors who came of age during World War II.

Participants meet biweekly at Siloam Presbyterian Church, which is a community centered meeting space that has a host of activities on a weekly basis. The Church is located in central Brooklyn, and was founded 153 years ago by Rev. James A. Gloucester, an ex-slave. Over the year, this Church has been an active and aggressive agency in advocating freedom for blacks and fighting for abolition of the fugitive Slave Act. It was a stop on the Underground Railroad and created a great amount of sentiment for the passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments. The Church has also been active in responding to policies of segregation and in helping to recruit and appoint African American School Teachers. As an important historical institution that is symbolic to the legacy of African Americans in this country, the location of this institution as a site for a writing workshop documenting the stories of older African Americans is appropriate and a testament to the value of that institution.

Many of the seniors who are participating in the memoir workshops are retired and actively involved in the life of the Church. All of the participants are between the ages of 70- 80 years old. Most of the participants were college

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educated professionals in the field of nursing, education and business.

The purpose of this workshop is turn good memories into good stories. *The Tales of Our Times* workshop focuses on the memories of seniors and how their stories reveal the foundation of American culture. Seniors can reflect on their past experiences and explore ways in which their experiences can come to life for many who have not heard their stories. The National Black Writers Conference invited the seniors to participate in the Seventh National Black Writers Conference last year.

## A Gwendolyn Brooks Symposium

celebrating her life and works

*April 8, 2005*



featuring

*Elizabeth Alexander* as

keynote speaker

*D.H. Melhem*

*Sharon Olds*

&

*Sonia Sanchez*



## Radio Series: Writers on Writing

By Teneisha Griffin

On Sundays at 7:00 – 7:30pm, The Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College, CUNY presents the series: *Writers on Writing* in the studios of Medgar Evers College via the airways of WNYE 91.5 F.M. The purpose of this program is to provide writers of color with opportunities to share their work, their craft, and their writing lives. This show, therefore, supports the mission of the Center for Black Literature that is to “serve to heighten the public’s awareness and knowledge of black literature”. The host of *Writers on Writing* is Dr. Brenda M. Greene, Executive Director of The Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College, CUNY.

During the last academic year, Dr. Greene interviewed a range of writers who include but are limited to Kevin Powell, author of *Whose Gonna Take the Weight: Manhood, Race & Power in America*; Dr. Westina Mat-

thews, author of *Have a Little Faith: The Faith of a Mustard Seed*; Nicole Duncan Smith and

Molefi Asante, Jr. authors of *Blokhedz: A Hip Hop Comic Book*; Dr. Linda Michelle Baron, author of *For The Love of Life & the Sun is Up*; Karen Siplin, author of the novel, *Such A Girl*; Carl Hancock Rux, author of the novel, *Asphalt*; Erica Simone Turnispeed, author of the novel, *A Love Noire*; Camille Yarbrough composer of *Family Forever*; Sheree Rene Thomas, editor of *Dark Matter: Reading The Bones*; Toni Blackman, author of *Inner-Course: A Plea For Real Love*; Tony Medina, author of *Committed to Breathing*; and Ntare Guma Mbabo Mwine, director of “Biro”.

*The purpose of this program is to provide writers of color with opportunities to share their work, their craft, and their writing lives.*

Please tune into the program every Sunday and hear authors. Editors, publishers, and illustrators form the literary community discuss their lives their craft, and their work.

## College Now: Spoken Word with Tracy Cook

By Teneisha Griffin

Tracy Cook, griot and spoken word artist, teaches the College Now course, Spoken Word Poetry sponsored by The Center for Black Literature at Medgar Evers College. The Spoken Word course began in September of the 2004 academic year and will end in the middle of December. This course is for high school seniors who have an interest in poetry. During the course, students will learn the foundations of “Spoken Word” as an art form and study the works of various artists.

Cook begins the course by getting her students to identify who they are. She engages these students by allowing them to identify those experiences that they are neutral to for example: love and hate. In addition, these future poets watch films, listen to music and receive a visit from a poet to fully understand the significance of “Spoken Word” poetry. At the end of this course, students will create their own “Spoken Word” poetry and produce their very own “Spoken Word” event.

**Calling all Readers and Writers ...**

**Hear the voices of writers from the African Diaspora**

Tune into the NBWC radio broadcast on Medgar Evers College Radio over  
**WNYE 91.5 F.M.**

**Writers on Writing**  
**Sundays, 7:00–7:30 pm**  
hosted by

Dr. Brenda M. Greene, Professor of English  
Executive Director, Center for Black Literature  
Medgar Evers College,  
City University of New York  
1650 Bedford Avenue  
Brooklyn, New York 11225  
718.270.6976



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