

Carolina African American Writers Collective

The Carolina African American Writers' Collective (CAAWC), based in Raleigh, is a workshop and readers' group consisting of poets, fiction writers, dramatists, essayists, journalists, children's writers, graphic artists, publicists, photographers, teachers, librarians, archivists, and editors who meet monthly to critique one another's work, read and discuss books by African American authors, and share information about the literary scene. CAAWC also serves as a literary and cultural arts liaison for the community.

Members of the Carolina African American Writers' Collective are currently featured in major anthologies, editions of national literary journals, newspapers, and magazines. Some of these publications include *Fertile Ground*; *Dark Eros*; *Catch the Fire!!!*; *The Saracen*; *BMA: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review*; *African American Review*; *FYAH*; and *PoetryBay*. The Collective has been featured at Page One Festival of the Book; the North Carolina Literary Festival; the Bimbe Festival; the Virginia Festival of the Book; the National Black Arts Festival; the Festival For The Eno; the Hayti Heritage Center; the North Carolina Museum of History; and at bookstores, schools, colleges and universities, libraries, and cultural arts centers. Mendi Lewis Obadike arranged a major CAAWC reading in 2001 as part of the Dialogue Among Civilizations Through Poetry (a United Nations-affiliated event). In addition, the collective has been featured on television and radio programs, including WSHA 88.9 FM radio station. Members often teach writing at colleges, universities, community centers, prisons, public schools, libraries, conferences, and writers' workshops and retreats.

I began planting the seeds for a writers' group in 1989. I met Janice W. Hodges that spring in an advanced poetry writing class taught by Gerald W. Barrax, at North Carolina State University. Janice and I were the only two African Americans enrolled in the class. We began to talk about our experiences and how we turned them into poetry. A few weeks after the class began, I told Janice that I was planning to start a writers' group for African Americans. Three years later, in February 1992, I sent letters to Janice W. Hodges, Carole Boston Weatherford, Jaki Shelton Green, Beverly Fields Burnette, and Cynthia Guinn inviting them to participate in a critique group that would meet at my house at 7:00 on the third Wednesday of every month. For a few months, Beverly Fields Burnette was the only writer who attended.

That summer, Nayo Barbara Malcolm Watkins hosted a Carolina African American Writers' Collective meeting at her house in Durham. Then in the fall, CAAWC convened again-this time at the Hayti Heritage Center, also in Durham. Although the organization struggled in its early days, Jerry W. Ward, Jr., continually encouraged me to keep working with CAAWC. In 1995, the collective experienced much growth. Nudged by Afele L. Tyehimba (formerly known as Lana C. Williams), former CAAWC president, I sent a letter to former and prospective members, informing them that I would host a critique meeting on Saturday morning, August 12, at 9:30 am. Since then, CAAWC has been meeting monthly, breaking only for the summer months. At present there are 40 members; and more writers are on the collective's waiting list. Members travel from as far away as Virginia, Ohio, Georgia, and elsewhere to attend CAAWC meetings.

Today L. Teresa Church, our archivist and membership chairperson, spreads the word about CAAWC and arranges readings for us at major festivals. The collective awards an annual series of prizes recognizing two writers for service to the state and to the national literary communities. Gina M. Streaty is the editor of *The CAAWC Newsletter*, which is distributed throughout the country and abroad. Stay tuned as the Carolina African American Writers Collective sends shockwaves throughout the literary world.

-Lenard D. Moore

[Lenard D. Moore](#) was the featured "Poet of the Week" from June 26th through July 2nd. This essay appeared in different form in BMA: The Sonia Sanchez Literary Review. The following links will take you to more information about the Carolina African American Writers Collective:

- http://www.poetrybay.com/spring2001/spring2001_22.html
- <http://aar.slu.edu/>
- http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~delancfe/5-2Spring_00.htm
- <http://authors.aalbc.com/fertileground.htm>