

# **Black Poetry after the Black Arts Movement**

University of Kansas

July 19-August 1, 2015

## **Week 1: The Demographics and Production of Black Poetry**

Resident Faculty: Howard Ramsby

Visiting Faculty: James Smethurst, Kathy Lou Schultz, Tyehimba Jess, Brenda Marie Osbey, Jerry W. Ward, Jr.

Public Panel: *Poetry and Its Futures* with Kevin Young, Frank X Walker, Megan Kaminski, Stephanie Fitzgerald, Lauri Ramey and Moderator Joanne Gabbin

### **Sunday, July 19, 2015**

12:00-4:00 Check-in for those staying on campus  
5:00-6:00 Welcome and Orientation  
6:00-7:00 Opening dinner hosted by KU

## **Monday, July 20, 2015**

### Morning Session

- 8:30-10:00 Overview Lecture – “Why Study/Teach Black Poetry Now?” Graham & Rambsy  
\*\*\*Graham’s and Rambsy’s opening lecture will provide an overview of the Institute and also make a case for why scholars in humanities (i.e. American Studies, English, African American literary studies, Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, Performance Studies) might provide “added value” to their fields by focusing on black poetry.
- 10:00-11:00 NEH Summer Scholars visit the KU Card Center to get their KUID cards
- 11:00-12:00 Overview Lecture Continued – Graham & Rambsy

### Afternoon Session

- 1:00-2:15 Lecture — “Production Matters, Anthologies & Canonical Poems” with Rambsy  
\*\*\*Rambsy’s lecture “Production Matters” will make participants aware of how anthologies have facilitated the rise of signature and canonical poems and the disappearance of others. The lecture will explain why and how Malcolm and Coltrane poems became so central to African American poetic discourse during the 1960s and 1970s, which paved the way for tribute poems and poems about or featuring music to become central to black poetic discourse.
- 2:30 – 4:15 Workshop: Becoming a Rap and Poetry Genius with Rambsy  
\*\*\* The workshop will also introduce participants to poetry pedagogical activities on the crowd-source annotation sites, Rap Genius and Lit Genius. The workshop will demonstrate how the sites can be used to enhance “close reading” and annotation skills, while encouraging students to become more involved with digital humanities while studying poetry.
- 4:15-5:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

## Tuesday, July 21, 2015

### Morning Session

- 8:30-11:00 Lecture — “The Legacies of the Literary Left” with James Smethurst  
\*\*\*Smethurst’s lecture on the legacies of the literary left will explain how leftist ideology and politics contributed to the production of African American poetry during the 1960s and 1970s. Smethurst will also discuss how the politics of community organizers and literary institutions gave rise to folk poetry and a sense among writers that they should also assume the roles of activists, cultural workers, musical collaborators, and playwrights in addition to their interests as poets. Poets we consider include Haki Madhubuti, Marilyn Nelson, Vievee Francis, and Michael Warr.
- 11:00-12:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Afternoon Session

- 12:30-1:30 Lecture — “The Geographies of African American Poetry” with Smethurst  
\*\*\*Smethurst’s lecture on the geographies or regions central to the histories of African American literature will give Institute participants a more detailed look at factors such as hometowns, migration patterns, political affiliations, and how alliances with particular editors in distinct locales have shaped black poets and their poetry.
- 1:45 – 3:30 Lecture — “Poetry as the Language of History” and Poetry Reading with Brenda Marie Osbey  
\*\*\*Osbey will discuss the use of history in poetry, and she will draw on her skills as a multi-lingual artist to discuss the impact of diaspora in her work and the works of other poets. Whereas modernist poets have been known to incorporate multiple Eurocentric languages in their works, Osbey’s presentation will address how the uses of different languages along the routes of black diaspora in poetry might enhance understanding of culture and diversity.

- Special Event                      The Commons, Spooner Hall, KU Campus  
4:00-6:30                      Public Panel and Reception

“Poetry and Its Futures” with Kevin Young, Frank X Walker, Megan Kaminski, Stephanie Fitzgerald, Lauri Ramey and moderated by Joanne Gabbin

## Wednesday, July 22, 2015

### Morning Session

- 8:30-11:00 Lecture — “The Ongoing Legacy of Amiri Baraka” with Kathy Lou Schultz  
\*\*\*Schultz’s lecture will concentrate on the late Amiri Baraka, one of the most prominent American poets. Schultz will discuss how Baraka’s work connects to older generations of poets, including Melvin Tolson and Langston Hughes, as well as contemporary generations of poets.
- 11:00-12:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Afternoon Session

- 1:00-2:15 Lecture — “African American Poetry Print Culture and Gender, Racial Counts” with Schultz  
\*\*\*Schultz’s lecture will concentrate on aspects of print culture, including the periodicals and presses that have facilitated the production of African American poetry during the contemporary era. In addition, drawing on the annual count coordinated by VIDA, an organization that tracks gender disparity in leading publications, Schultz will lead a discussion concerning the “counts” or quantifiable presence of black men and women poets among publications and award-granting institutions.
- 2:30 – 4:15 Workshop: Digital resources in the study of African American poetry with Rambsy  
\*\*\*The workshop will make NEH Summer Scholars aware of online digital resources featuring poetry such as the Poetry Foundation site, Poets.org, PennSound, and YouTube. The workshop will also introduce participants to ways of utilizing Google’s Ngram Viewer and text-mining software to engage poetry.
- 4:15-5:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Special Event

- Black Archives of Mid-America  
1722 E. 17<sup>th</sup> Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64108
- 6:30-8:30 Kevin Young Poetry Reading
- |           |                     |
|-----------|---------------------|
| 6:30-7:00 | Reception           |
| 7:00-7:30 | Open Mic            |
| 7:30-8:30 | Kevin Young Reading |

## Thursday, July 23, 2015

### Morning Session

- 8:30-11:00 Lecture – “Bob Kaufman, Michael Harper, and Lorenzo Thomas: Continuities and Displacements” with Jerry W. Ward, Jr.  
\*\*\* Form and content in the poetry of Bob Kaufman, Michael S. Harper, and Lorenzo Thomas (Beat vision, jazz modalities, urban wit) encourage contemporary readers to speculate regarding how influence, continuities, and displacements function in poetry. We can examine how **innovation** in Asili Ya Nadhiri's "tonal drawings" is a sonic response to Kaufman's surrealism. We can contrast the **genteel remembering** evoked by Harper's references to music and history with the **abrasive remembering** activated by the quips in the work of Charlie R. Braxton. The **challenge of cognition** links the experiments of Lorenzo Thomas with those of Thomas Sayers Ellis. Readers who reject the tyranny of the Academy empower themselves to discover the critical functions of poetry as situated responses to lived experiences rather than as genuflections before orthodox
- 11:00-12:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Afternoon Session

- 1:00-2:15 Lecture — “Black Persona Poetry Then and Now” with Rambsy  
\*\*\*Rambsy will give a presentation on persona poems, one of the most prevalent modes of writing by contemporary poets over the last 15 years. The lecture will highlight notable poems and volumes featuring persona poems by several contemporary poets, including Cornelius Eady, Patricia Smith, Lucille Clifton, Ai, Arian Matejka, Saul Williams, and Tyehimba Jess.
- 2:30 – 4:15 Discussion and Reading — Tyehimba Jess  
\*\*\*Jess, a skilled performer of verse and former participant in spoken word competitions, will provide Institute participants with an understanding of how poetry might be optimally performed, offering us important insights into the contemporary performance histories of black poetry. Jess’s volume *Leadbelly*, which is fully comprised of poems written in the first-person voice of multiple characters, will extend our Institute’s conversation concerning the use of persona poems by large numbers of contemporary African American poets.
- 4:15-5:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

## **Friday, July 24, 2015**

### Morning Session

- 8:30-11:00 Workshop – “Blogging African American Poetry” with Ramsy  
\*\*\*Ramsy will lead a workshop on the use of blogs for the composition and presentation of historical and contemporary information on African American poetry. The workshop will also concentrate on how to involve undergraduates and graduate students in the process of producing online work on black poetry.
- 11:00-12:00 Collaborative Group Work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Lunch Session

- 12:00-2:00 Film – *Coal Black Voices* (60 minutes)  
Grab your lunch and meet back in the Malott Room to eat, view and discuss the film.

### Afternoon Session

- 2:00-5:00 Collaborative Group Work, meetings with faculty, or reading

## **Saturday, July 25, 2015**

No activities planned

## **Sunday, July 26, 2015**

Taproom Poetry Series Featuring William J. Harris and Evie Shockley  
5PM Open Mic and Poetry Reading  
Eighth Street Taproom, 801 New Hampshire Street, Lawrence

## **Week 2: Contemporary Black Poetry and Poetic Form**

Resident Faculty: Evie Shockley

Visiting Faculty: William J. Harris, Ed Pavlic, Harryette Mullen, Keith Leonard,  
Meta DuEwa Jones

## **Monday, July 27, 2015**

### Morning Session

- 8:30-11:00     Lecture “Contemporary Black Poetry: Tradition and Innovation” and Discussion with Evie Shockley  
\*\*\*The week’s opening lecture offers an overview of the African American poetry of the last few decades, taking the Black Arts Movement as a touchstone and moving both synchronically outward and diachronically forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It sketches out major movements and trends, both acknowledging and troubling the boundaries that have categorized black poets within different groups. Key figures for this talk include Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Yusef Komunyakaa, Harryette Mullen, Terrance Hayes, and Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon.
- 11:00-12:00     Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Afternoon Session

- 1:00-3:00     Lecture—“Poetry and Jazz Aesthetics” and Discussion with William J. Harris  
\*\*\*The afternoon session provides an exploration of jazz aesthetics, a time-honored mode of poetic practice among black poets. Harris will discuss major contributors to the discourse of jazz poetry such as Amiri Baraka, Jayne Cortez, Michael Harper, Sonia Sanchez, and Quincy Troupe, among others. Participants will learn not only about the music and musicians that have been especially inspiring for African American poets, but also how using jazz music as a model has shaped the formal approaches poets have used.
- 3:15-4:15     NEH Summer Scholar Collaborative Group Presentation – Group #1

## **Tuesday, July 28, 2015**

### Morning Session

- 8:30-11:00 Lecture "As a dance / it is obscure": Black Music and the Cross-Rhythms of Poetic Thought" and Discussion with Ed Pavlic  
\*\*\*Building upon a creative and critical discourse that comes from writers including Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin and Yusef Komunyakaa, as well as critics such as Craig Werner, Meta DuEwa Jones, Emily Lordi and others, Ed Pavlic's morning session will offer participants a way to think about how Afro-modernist poetry structures itself conceptually in relation to black music. The lecture will cover the importance of music (gospel, blues, jazz, soul, and hip hop) to African American poetic voice in thematic terms.
- 11:00-12:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Afternoon Session

- 1:00-2:15 Lecture – "Modern Men in the Pepperpot: Continuance and the Legacy of Robert Hayden" and Discussion with Pavlic  
\*\*\*Pavlic's lecture explores how poets Yusef Komunyakaa and Christopher Gilbert carried on and expanded Hayden's vision of a radically and racially democratic vista into the decades beyond Hayden's death in 1980. We'll consider what poetic tools the work of these writers offered and offers contemporary poets
- 2:30-3:30 Workshop in Close Reading with Shockley  
\*\*\*Participants will collaborate on close readings of poems by writers who have emerged within the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a way of strengthening NEW Summer Scholars' understanding of the relationship between form and subject matter in the analysis of poetry, as well as familiarizing them with a few of the most exciting "very contemporary" new poets (Dawn Lundy Martin, Douglas Kearney, and Aracelis Girmay).
- 3:45-4:45 NEH Summer Scholar Collaborative Group Presentation – Group #2

## Wednesday, July 29, 2015

### Morning Session

8:30-11:00 Lecture – “Robert Hayden, Melvin Tolson, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, and their Poetic Heirs” and Discussion with Keith D. Leonard  
\*\*\*Keith Leonard will lecture on post-Civil Rights era approaches to “traditional” poetic form, tracing these forward from earlier exemplars such as Hayden, Tolson and Brooks. His talk will address the contested meaning of “traditional” in this context, returning to questions about *which tradition(s)* black poetry is indebted to for its formal structures and opening up consideration of “new traditions” of African American form invented in the contemporary moment.

### Lunch Session

11:30-2:30 View Documentary: *BaddDDD Sonia Sanchez* (90 minutes) followed by Lunch and Discussion

### Afternoon Session

3:00-5:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

## **Thursday, July 30, 2015**

### Morning Session

- 8:30-11:00 Lecture – “Redefining Black Aesthetics: Black Poetry after ‘The New Black Poetry’” and Discussion with Shockley  
\*\*\*Shockley’s morning lecture will synthesize some of the conceptual threads of the week by surveying some of the ways we might think of “black aesthetics” in describing the strategies contemporary African American poets are employing to negotiate the ongoing challenges of making their art in a white supremacist society. The talk will center on contemporary representations of slavery and the role of the visual in poetry by Thylia Moss, Julie Patton, Thomas Sayers Ellis, and Natasha Trethewey.
- 11:00-12:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Afternoon Session

- 1:00-3:30 Lecture – “Forms of Innovation in Avant-Garde Poetry” and Poetry Reading by Harryette Mullen, followed by Discussion  
\*\*\*Mullen will provide participants with a map of the landscape of innovative African American poetry in which her own important and acclaimed work is situated. Her talk will distinguish types of innovation, such as language-oriented work, politically radical approaches, and visionary procedures, that (re)introduce participants to such “experimental” or “oppositional” poets as Lorenzo Thomas, Nathaniel Mackey, Erica Hunt, Will Alexander, M. NourbeSe Phillip, and Giovanni Singleton. She will then give a reading of her poetry, which cuts across and illuminates a variety of innovative strategies.
- 3:45-4:45 NEH Summer Scholar Collaborative Group Presentation – Group #3

## **Friday, July 31, 2015**

### Morning Session

- 8:30-11:00 Lecture – “Diaspora in Contemporary Black Poetry and Poetics” and Discussion with Meta DuEwa Jones  
\*\*\*The final lecture of the week will open the discussion of contemporary African American poetry to a consideration of broader geographical and cultural influences. Jones’ talk addresses the influence and configuration of other (non-U.S.) locations and cultures of the African diaspora within the work of “traditionally” African American poets, as well as those who are themselves immigrants to the U.S. Key figures would include C.S. Giscombe, Audre Lorde, Nathaniel Mackey, Ntozake Shange, Ishion Hutchinson, Allison Joseph and Kwame Dawes. Special attention will be given to the UK-based dub poetry movement, and its major poets Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah.
- 11:00-12:00 Collaborative Group work, meetings with faculty, or reading

### Afternoon Session

- 1:00-2:00 NEH Summer Scholar Collaborative Group Presentation – Group #4  
2:15-3:15 NEH Summer Scholar Collaborative Group Presentation – Group #5  
3:30 Institute Photo

### Evening Session

- 5:30-7:30 Closing Banquet

## **Saturday, August 1, 2015**

- 11:00AM Check-out for those staying on campus