

For Immediate Release

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Margaret Walker Center celebrates the 75th anniversary of *For My People* with Airea Dee Matthews, 2016 Yale Younger Poets winner on Friday, December 1, at Jackson State University.

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Airea Dee Matthews, 2016 Yale Younger Poets Winner

Jackson, MS—In 1942, Margaret Walker won the Yale Younger Poets Prize for her poem *For My People* and the book of poetry by the same name. In so doing, she became the first African American to win a national writing prize from an organization other than a historically black institution such as the NAACP.

For My People launched Margaret Walker’s career and spoke of the struggles, dreams, and persistence of African Americans. In the final stanza, Walker declared:

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a
bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second
generation full of courage issue forth; let a people
loving freedom come to growth. Let a beauty full of
healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing
in our spirits and our blood. Let the martial song
be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now
rise and take control.

Seven years later in 1949, Margaret Walker joined the English faculty at Jackson State, where she spent the rest of her career and, in 1968, founded the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People. Now named in her honor, the Margaret Walker Center is a museum and special collections archive dedicated to the African American experience.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Yale University Press publication of the book *For My People* and Margaret Walker’s receiving the Yale Prize.

On Friday, December 1, 2017, at 1 p.m. in the JSU Student Center Theater, the Margaret Walker Center will celebrate this anniversary with a poetry reading and conversation featuring Airea Dee Matthews, who, in 2016, became the first black woman since Margaret Walker to win the Yale Younger Poets Prize for her book of poetry *Simulacra*.

“We try to lift up the academic and artistic legacy of Margaret Walker each day,” says Center Director, Dr. Robert Luckett. “Part of her brilliance is the continued resonance in America of works like *For My People*, and we are proud to bring Airea Dee Matthews to Jackson State. She fits perfectly with the tradition of Margaret Walker and the generations of writers she inspired.”

A Cave Canem Fellow and Kresge Foundation Literary Arts Fellow, Matthews is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Byrn Mawr College and is a member of the Academy of American Poets. She lives

with her family in Detroit, where she is working on her second poetry collection, *under/class*, which explores poverty.

Free and open to the public, the conversation with Matthews at Jackson State will be moderated by Maryemma Graham, the foremost Margaret Walker scholar and University of Kansas Distinguished Professor of English.

Along with a forthcoming biography of Margaret Walker, *The House Where My Soul Lives*, from Oxford University Press, Graham has published numerous books, including *Conversation with Margaret Walker* (University Press of Mississippi, 2002) and *Fields Watered with Blood: Critical Essays on Margaret Walker* (University of Georgia Press, 2001), and she contributed the introduction to Margaret Walker's re-released final book of poetry *This Is My Century* (University of Georgia Press, 2013).

For more information, contact the Margaret Walker Center at 601-979-3935 or mwa@jsums.edu.



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