



## Press Release

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### For Immediate Release:

Installation of Toni Morrison Society “Bench by the Road” and keynote by Nikky Finney, National Book Award Winner for Poetry, will highlight 2015 Creative Arts Festival at Jackson State University.



Jackson, MS—The Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University is pleased to announce that Nikky Finney, 2011 National Book Award winner for poetry, will deliver the keynote address during the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Creative Arts Festival: *Margaret Walker ~ This Is My Century*. Featuring student performances and panel presentations, the Creative Arts Festival will take place on Friday and Saturday, April 10 and 11, in the JSU Student Center. The keynote address will be at 12:00 p.m. in the Student Center Legacy Dining Hall.

Nikky Finney was born in South Carolina, within listening distance of the sea. A child of activists, she came of age during the civil rights and Black Arts Movements. At Talladega College, nurtured by Hale Woodruff’s Amistad murals, Finney began to understand the powerful synergy between art and history. Finney has authored four books of poetry: *Head Off & Split* (2011); *The World Is Round* (2003); *Rice* (1995); and *On Wings Made of Gauze* (1985). The John H. Bennett, Jr. Chair in Southern Letters and Literature at the University of South Carolina, Finney also authored *Heartwood* (1997), edited *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South* (2007), and co-founded the Affrilachian Poets. Finney’s fourth book of poetry, *Head Off & Split* was awarded the 2011 National Book Award for poetry, and she recently wrote the Foreword to Margaret Walker’s re-released book of poetry, *This Is My Century* (2013).

The Creative Arts Festival will kick off with a roundtable discussion on the connection between the arts and activism with a renowned group of authors and scholars, including Nikky Finney, Carolyn Denard, Raquel Rivera, Carolyn Brown, and Deborah Barnes. Immediately following the roundtable, the Margaret Walker Center will dedicate a Toni Morrison Society “Bench by the Road,” a memorial history and community outreach initiative that was launched on February 18, 2006, on the occasion of Toni Morrison’s 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The name is taken from Morrison’s remarks in a 1989 interview with *World Magazine*, where she spoke of the absences of historical markers that help remember the lives of Africans who were enslaved and of how her fifth novel, *Beloved*, served this symbolic role.

The Bench at Jackson State will be placed in recognition of the artistic and academic legacy of Margaret Walker on the occasion of her centennial year. Walker played a pivotal role as a poet and novelist during the Black Arts Movement. Her collection of poetry, *For My People* (1942), won the Yale Series of



Younger Poets Award, making her the first Black woman to receive a national writing prize. Her novel, *Jubilee* (1966), based on her grandmother's memories, initiated a genre of neo-slave novels, including Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), that told the story of slavery from the perspective of the slaves themselves. In 1968, while a member of the faculty at Jackson State College, she founded the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People, named in her honor in 1979.

On Saturday, April 11, student presentation will take place over the course of the day during concurrent sessions, and a poetry reading will be held at 1:30 p.m. at the Student Center. A reading by Raquel Rivera and an awards ceremony, including the annual \$1,000 Margaret Walker Award for the best essay by a JSU student, will conclude the Festival at 4:00 p.m. in the Student Center Theater.

**All events are free and open to the public.**

For more information, visit the Center's website at [www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter](http://www.jsums.edu/margaretwalkercenter) or contact the Center's staff at 601-979-2055 or [mwa@jsums.edu](mailto:mwa@jsums.edu).

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